SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

首斬り朝

VOLUME 10 **A COUPLE OF JITTE**

By **KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA**

SAMURAI 首斬り朝 EXECUTIONER

Punished is not the man himself,
but the evil that resides in him.

story
KAZUO KOIKE

art
GOSEKI KOJIMA

®
DARK HORSE MANGA™

translation
MARC MIYAKE

lettering & retouch
SNO CONE STUDIOS

publisher
MIKE RICHARDSON

editor
TIM ERVIN

book design
DARIN FABRICK

art director
LIA RIBACCHI

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A COUPLE OF JITTE

by KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

10

A NOTE TO READERS

Samurai Executioner is a carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

首斬り朝

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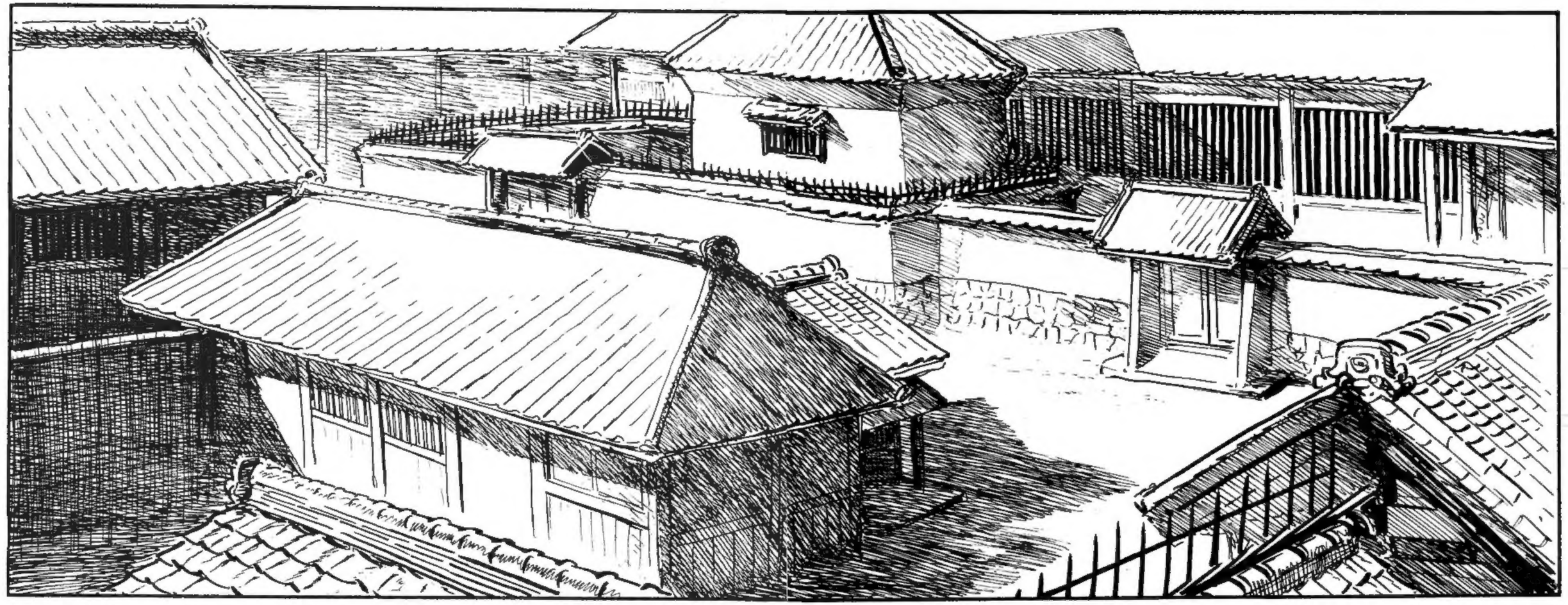
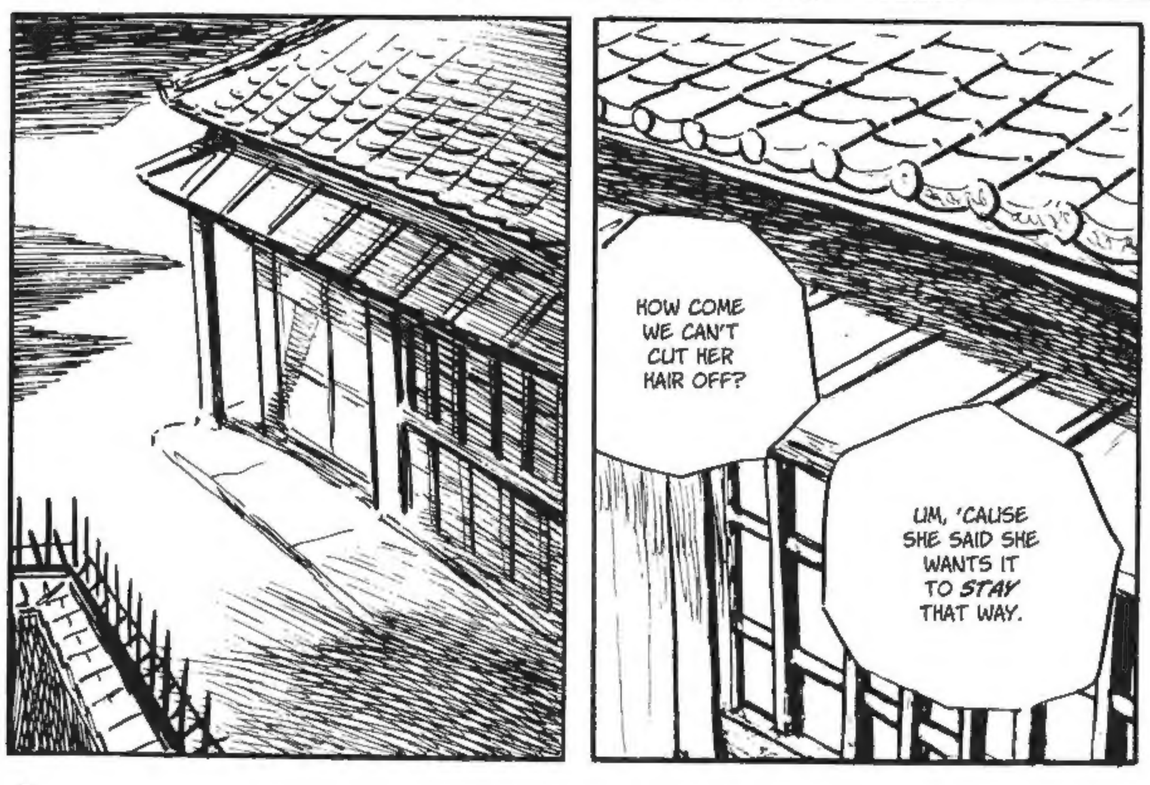
The Virtue Boat




HOW COME WE CAN'T CUT HER HAIR OFF?
UM, 'CAUSE SHE SAID SHE WANTS IT TO *STAY* THAT WAY.

IF WE TRY TO *FORCE* HER TO GET IT CUT, SHE GOES TOTALLY *BERSERK*.
同心詰所
CONSTABLES' OFFICE
OH.

EVEN THE *HEAD PRISONER* ASKED US TO JUST LET IT GO.

BUT YOU KNOW, *THAT* IS JUST *TOO* LONG.

BUT IT'S REALLY NO BIG DEAL IF HER HAIR'S LONG.

BUT IT'D *MESS UP* HER EXECUTION.

WOULDN'T HER HAIR MAKE THINGS A LITTLE *DIFFICULT* FOR THE EXECUTIONER?

YOU *FOOL.* LONG HAIR'S JUST LIKE *STRING.*

BUT...WELL, THAT'S WHAT THE HEAD PRISONER SAID, AND SHE'S GOING TO BE EXECUTED SOON.

SHE'D CAUSE A *LOT* OF TROUBLE IF SHE WENT CRAZY *THEN.*

IF SHE LOSES IT AT THE EXECUTION GROUNDS, SHE'S *NEVER* GONNA REST IN *PEACE.*

BUT WATCH OUT.

OKAY.

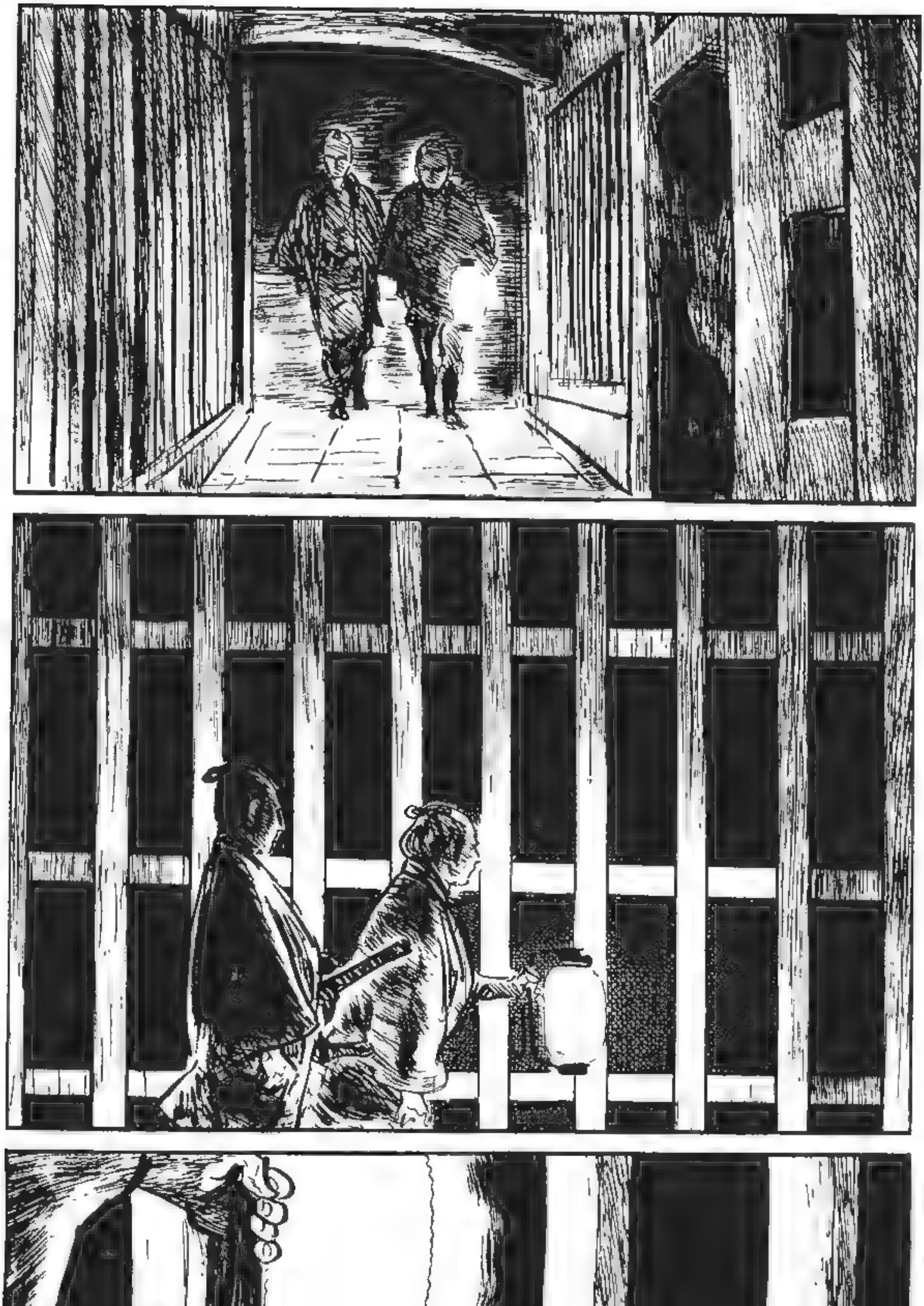
HAVEN'T *WE* BEEN CARELESS?

WHO KNOWS *HOW* LONG HER HAIR'S GROWN BY NOW?

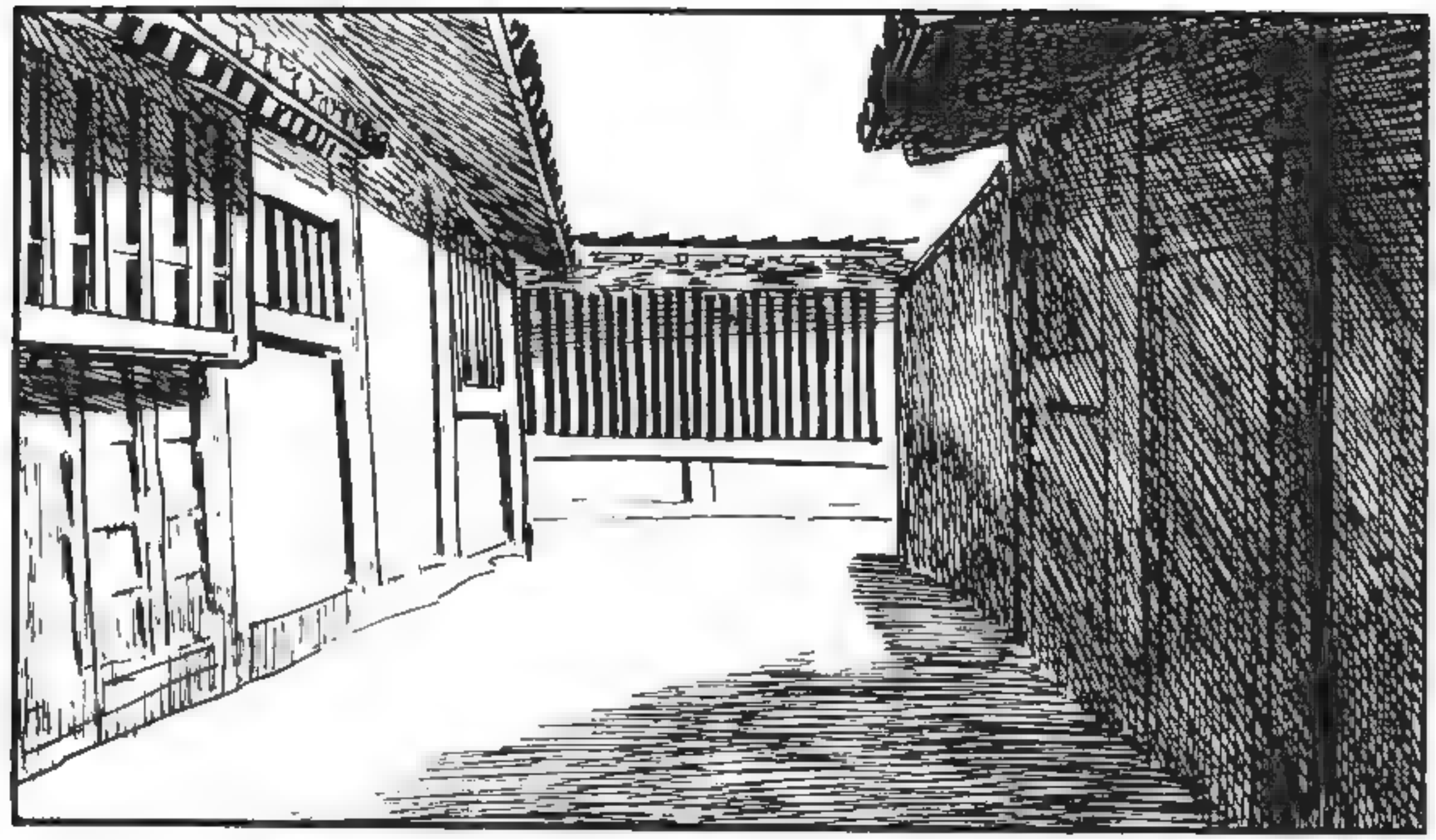
YEAH, REALLY.

I WONDER *WHY* SHE GREW HER HAIR SO LONG?

WE *TRIED* TO FIGURE OUT THE REASON, BUT WE NEVER GOT ANYWHERE...



EVERYTHING
LOOKS
NORMAL.



THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

IF YOU HAVE ANY *LAST WORDS*, I'LL LISTEN.

THANK YOU.

I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A REQUEST.

PLEASE ALLOW ME TO *HOLD* MY HAIR.

I DON'T CARE. DO AS YOU PLEASE.

THANK YOU.

THAT WAY...

...WHEN YOU CUT OFF MY *HEAD*, YOU'LL ALSO CUT OFF MY *HAIR* WHICH'LL STAY IN MY HANDS.

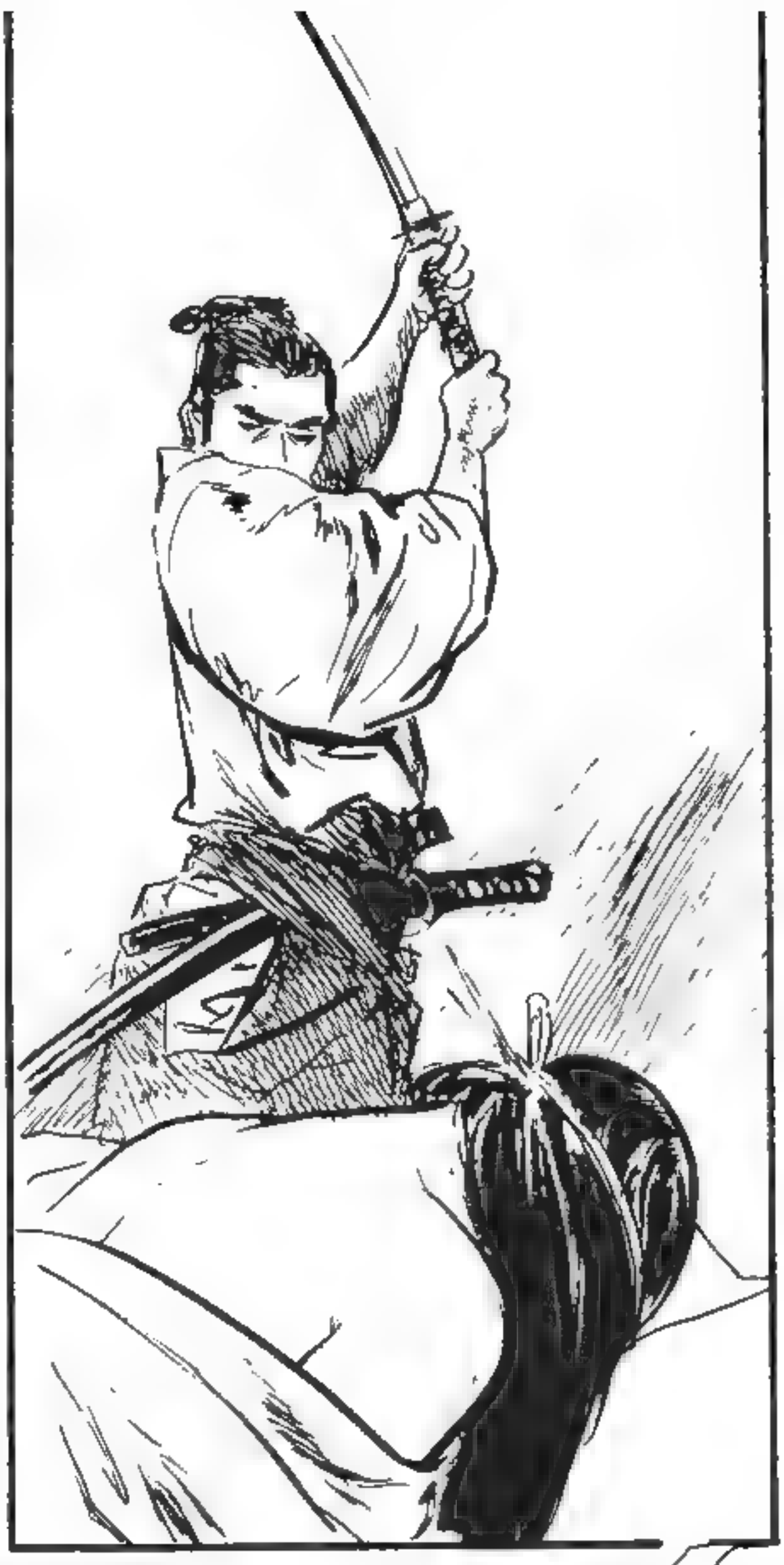
PLEASE GIVE THAT HAIR TO *SEIJI*. HE'S A BOAT CAPTAIN ON THE *GYOTOKŪ RIVERBANK*.

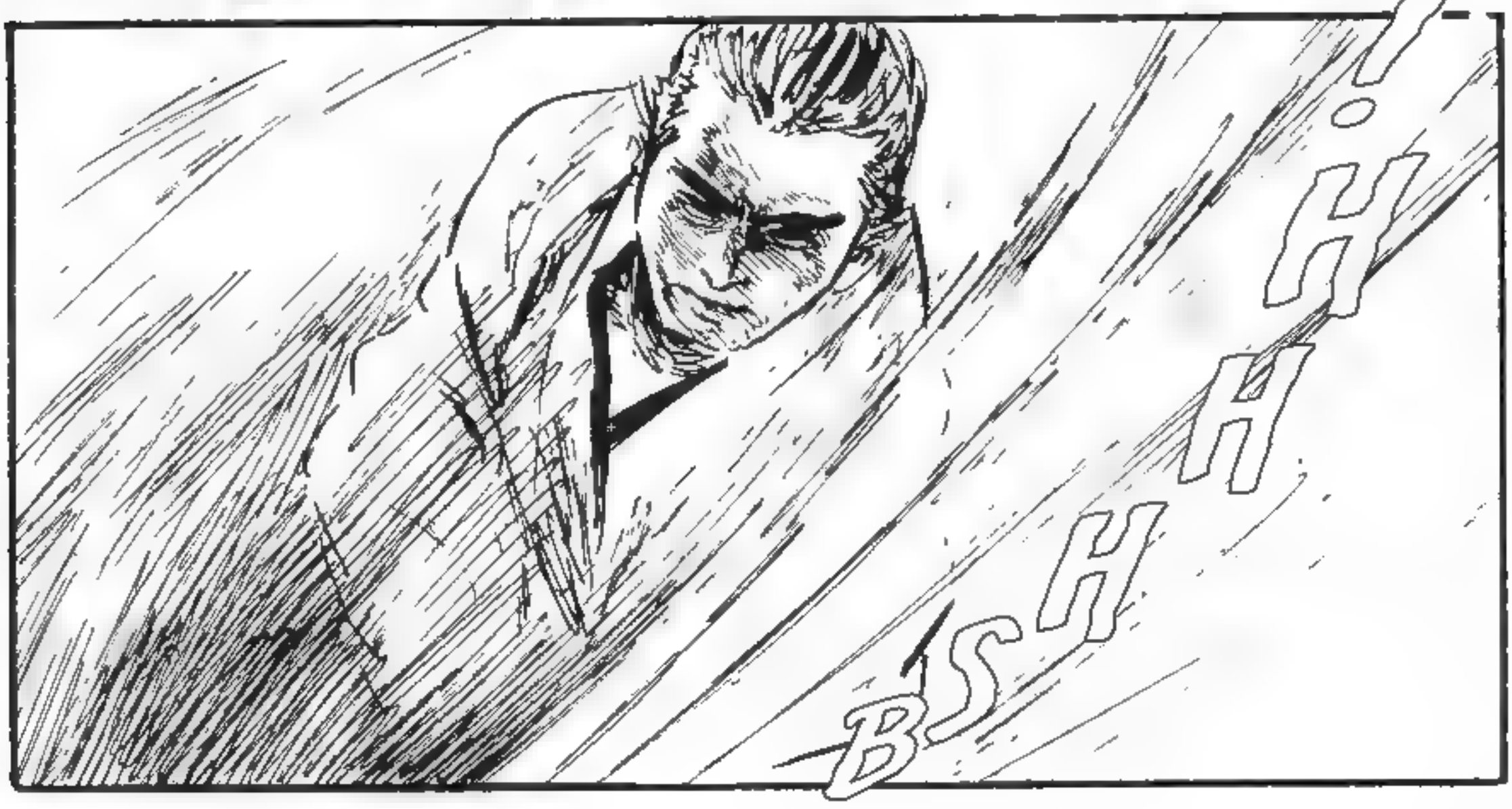
PLEASE, I BEG YOU.

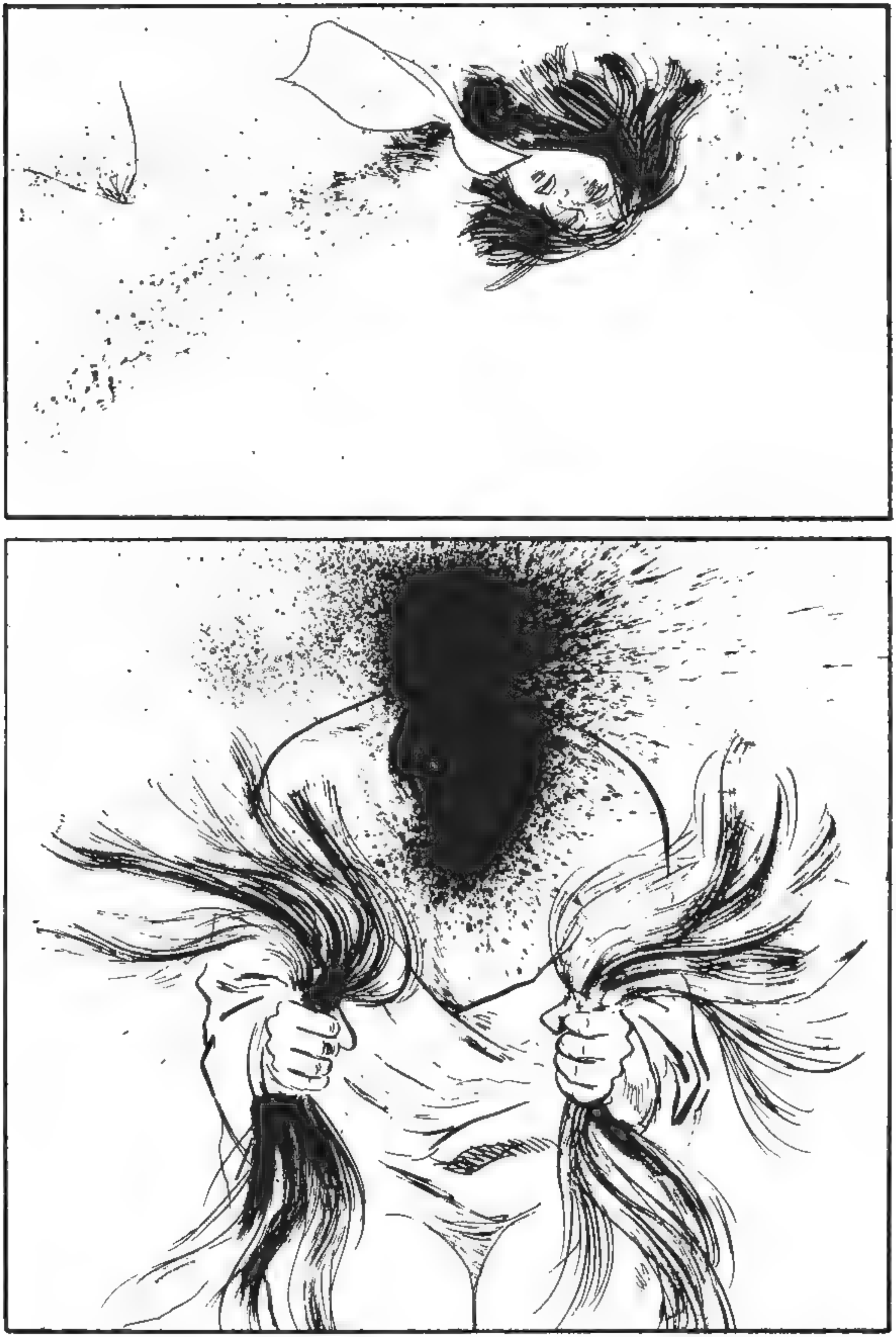
ALL RIGHT. YOU HAVE *BEHAVED* YOURSELF IN PRISON, AND YOU HAVE *DEEPLY REGRETTED* YOUR CRIME. THAT IS *COMMENDABLE.*

HENCE THE WITNESSES WILL ALLOW YOU TO RECEIVE *SPECIAL* TREATMENT.

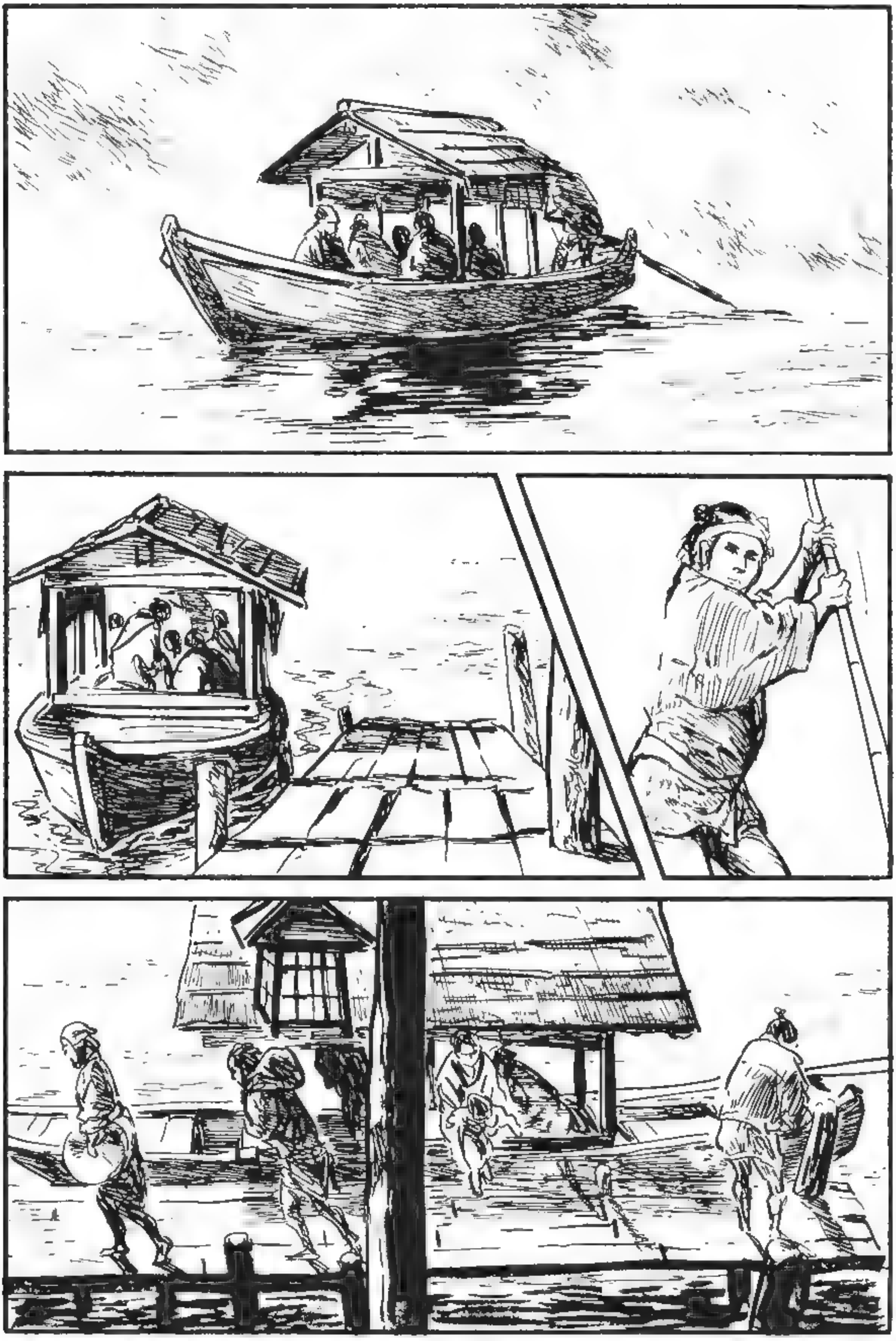
THANK... YOU.

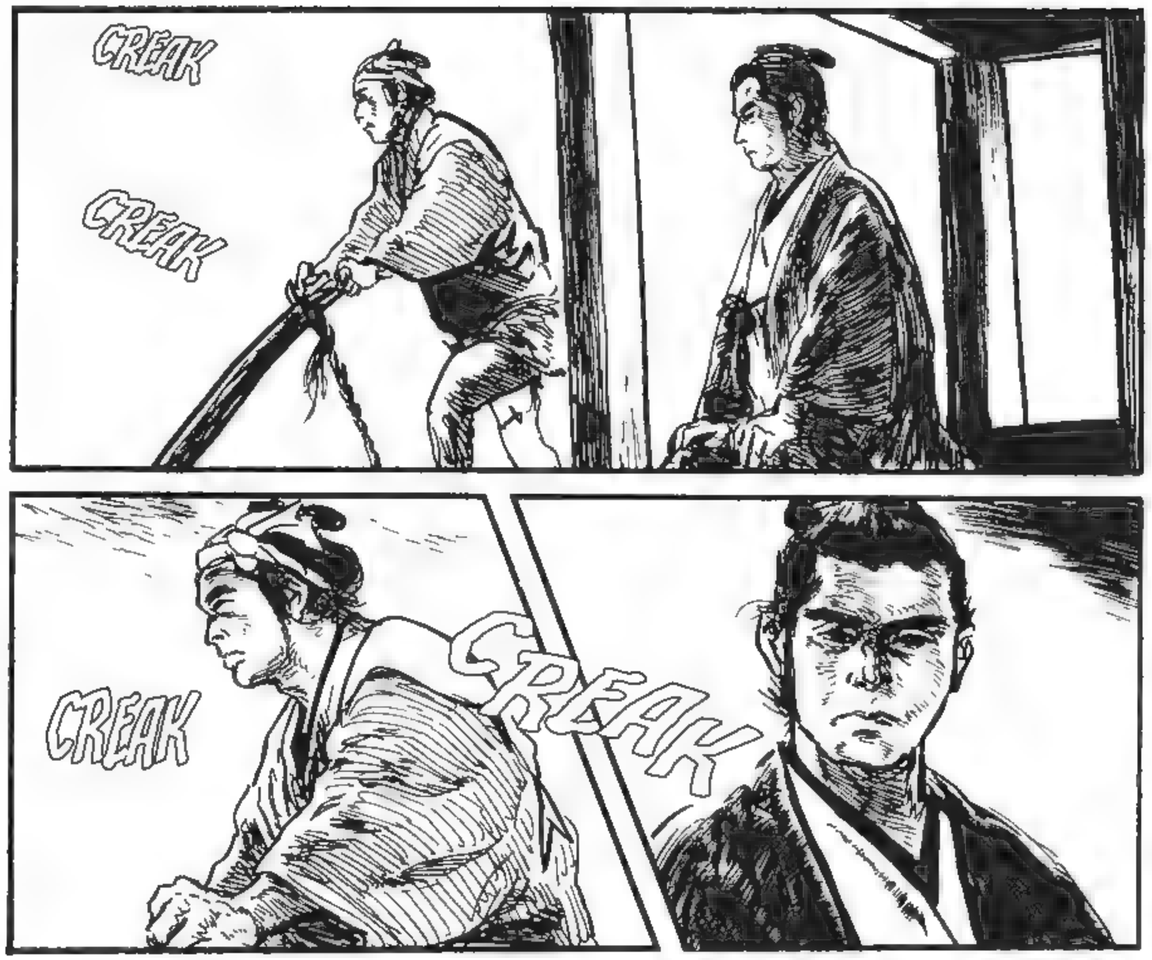


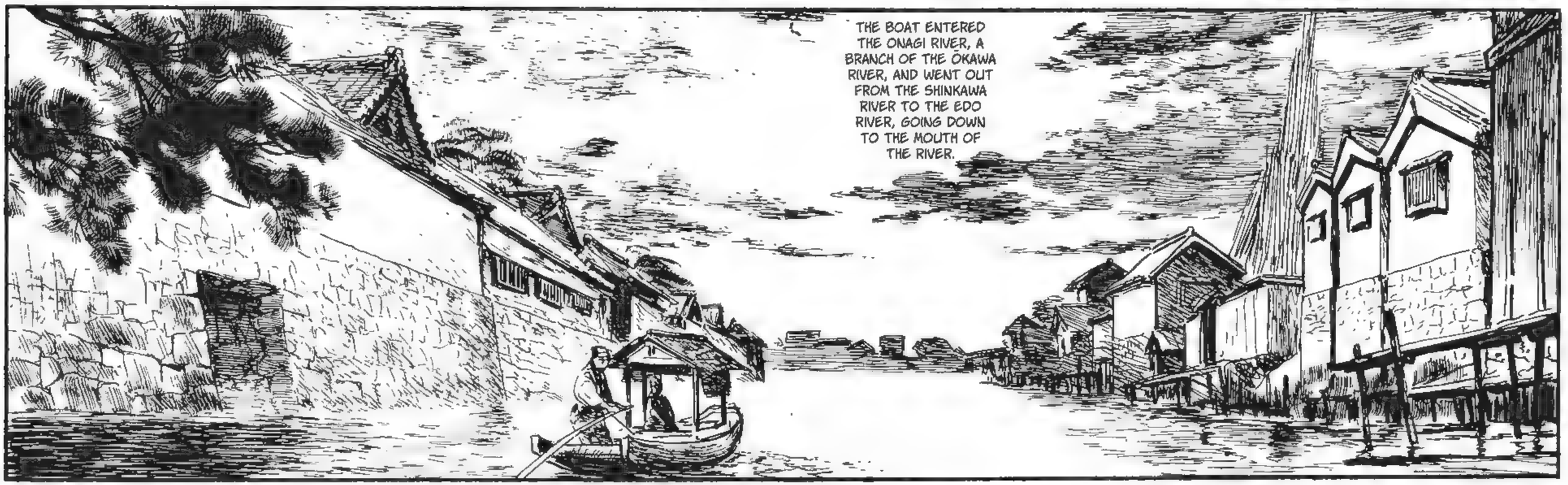

BSHH

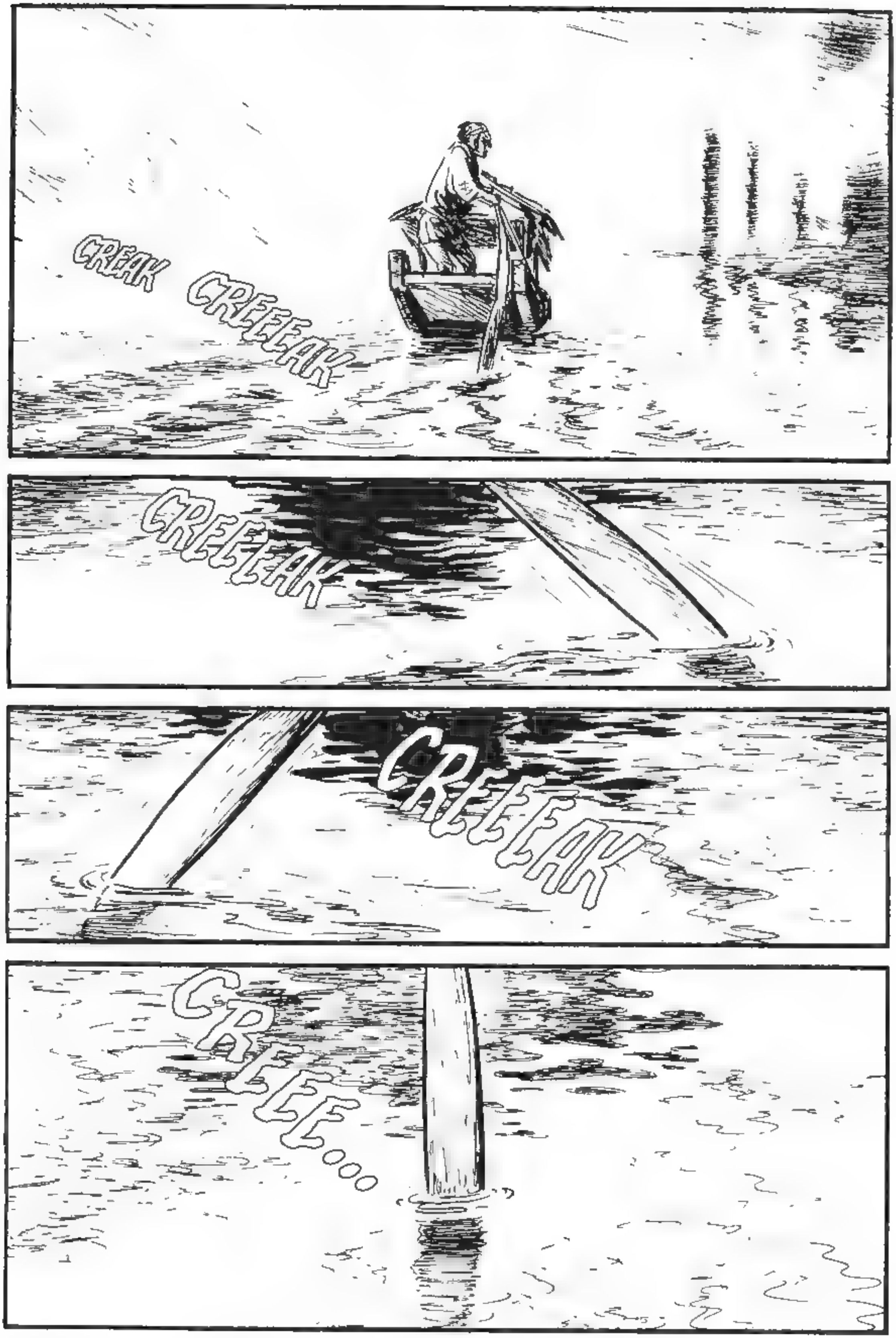


THE GYŌTOKU RIVERBANK WAS IN FRONT OF KOZUNA. IT WAS ABOUT THREE *RI* AND EIGHT *CHŌ* TO GYŌTOKU RIVERBANK ITSELF.




CREAK
CREAK
CREAK
CREAK


THE BOAT ENTERED THE ONAGI RIVER, A BRANCH OF THE ŌKAWA RIVER, AND WENT OUT FROM THE SHINKAWA RIVER TO THE EDO RIVER, GOING DOWN TO THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER.


CREAK
CREEAK
CREEAK
CREEAK
CREEAK
BLOOD

"SO THAT'S WHY."

WHAT?

I CUT THAT HAIR.

WHY DID SHE WANT TO BE EXECUTED WITH HER HAIR THAT LONG?

AND WHY DID SHE TELL ME TO GIVE HER HAIR TO YOU?

I WANTED TO KNOW. THAT'S WHY I CAME. I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT KNOW.

YOU AND KURA WERE IN LOVE, WEREN'T YOU?

I HAVE A WIFE.

I'VE PLEDGED MY LOVE TO HER UNTIL MY NEXT LIFE.

KURA WAS...

...A CHILDHOOD *FRIEND*. WE GREW UP AS CHILDREN OF RIVERBOAT CAPTAINS.

I WAS *DESTINED* TO BE IN CHARGE OF THIS TEA BOAT.

AND I WAS *SUPPOSED* TO BE MARRIED TO KURA.

NO, MAYBE I *HAD* TO BE...

CREAK

BUT... I FELL IN LOVE WITH *ANOTHER WOMAN.* I RISKED MY *LIFE* FOR HER.

I *KNEW* HOW KURA FELT, BUT THIS COULDN'T GO ON.

CREAK

CREAK

WHEN WE WERE KIDS, I *PROMISED* KURA...

IT WAS *KURA'S* IDEA.

IF SHE DIED, I PROMISED HER THAT I'D USE HER HAIR AS AN *OAR-ROPE*. THAT WAY, SHE COULD BE WITH ME *FOREVER*....

SO I TOLD HER, FINE.

TWO YEARS AFTER I GOT MARRIED, KURA LEFT THE COUNTRYSIDE AND WENT TO WORK FOR A STORE. I HEARD A RUMOR THAT SHE HAD *KILLED* SOMEONE.

AND THEN I GOT HER HAIR...THAT WAS WHEN I *UNDERSTOOD*.

SHE *WASN'T* A MURDERER.

SHE DID IT SO SHE COULD BE WITH *ME*....

IF SHE HAD COMMITTED SUICIDE, PEOPLE WOULD'VE BEEN *TALKING*.

THEY'D BE SAYING SHE KILLED HERSELF 'CAUSE SHE COULDN'T BE WITH SEIJI.

THAT'D MEAN TROUBLE FOR ME AND MY WIFE. BUT IF SHE GOT EXECUTED FOR A *CRIME*, THEN THEY'D ONLY BE SAYING BAD THINGS ABOUT *HER*.

AND *THAT'S* WHY....

THAT'S THE KIND OF WOMAN SHE WAS.

BUT...THIS WAS THE *ONLY* WAY SHE COULD BE WITH ME.

SHE HAD *NO* CHOICE.

SHE WAS GROWING HER HAIR LONG EVEN *BEFORE* SHE COMMITTED MURDER. I SHOULD'VE FIGURED IT OUT.

CREAK

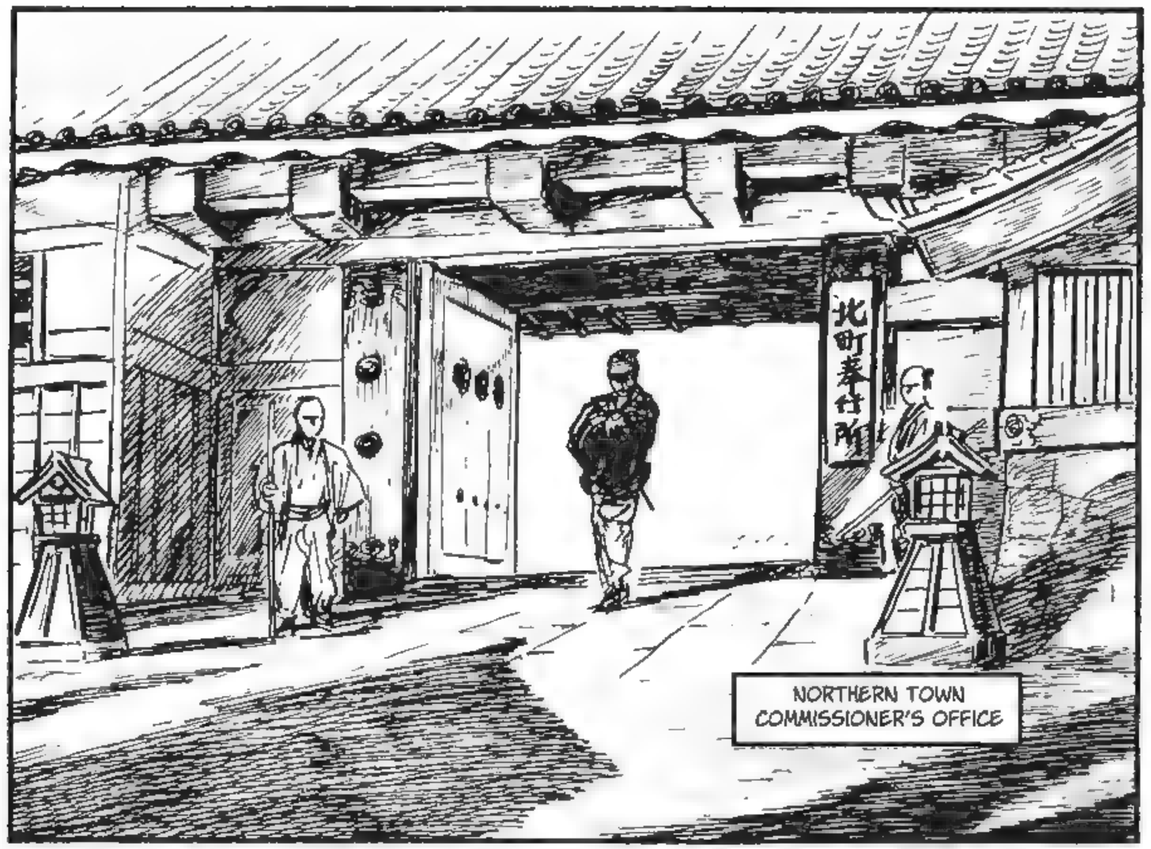
CREEEAK

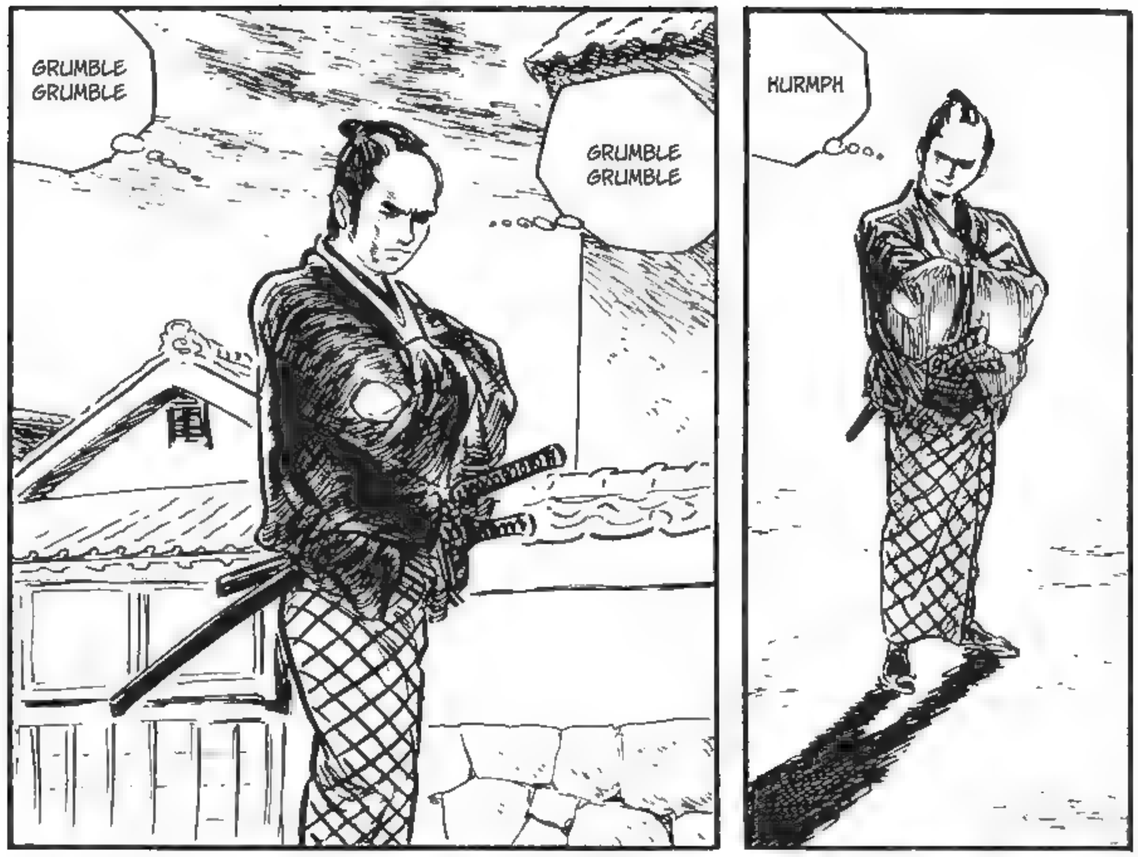
I'M GOING TO KEEP ON ROWING...

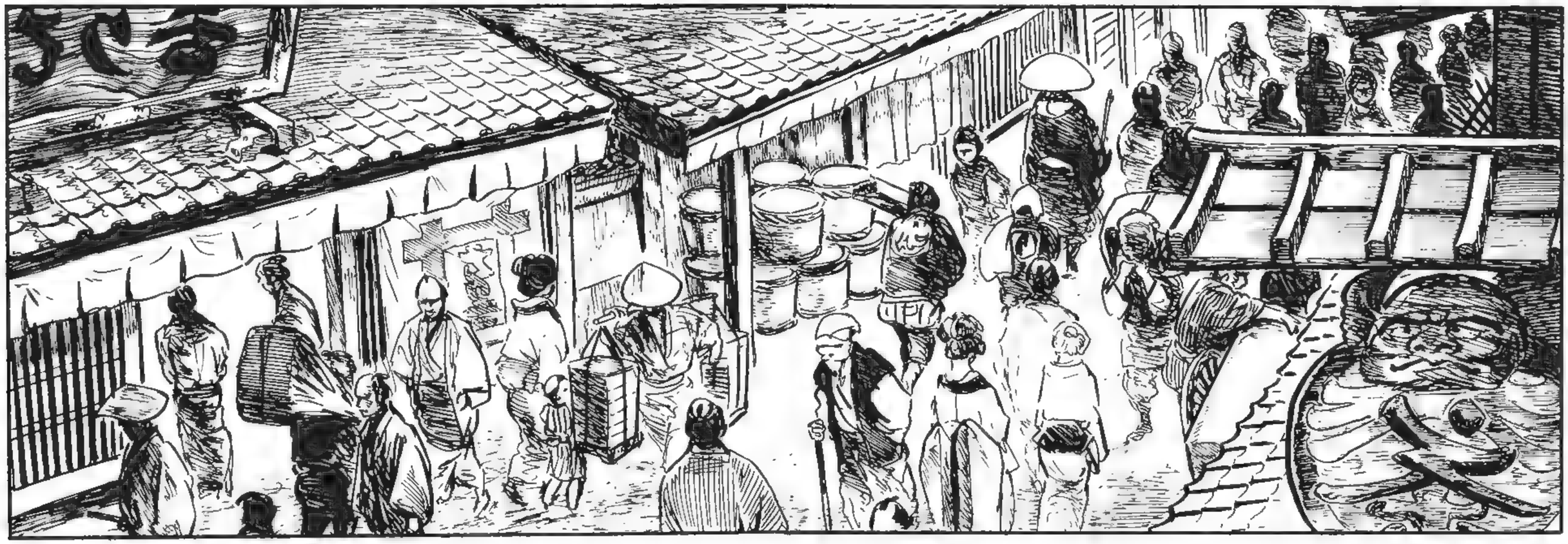
...WITH HER HAIR... UNTIL IT TURNS *WHITE*... UNTIL IT *WEARS OUT*.

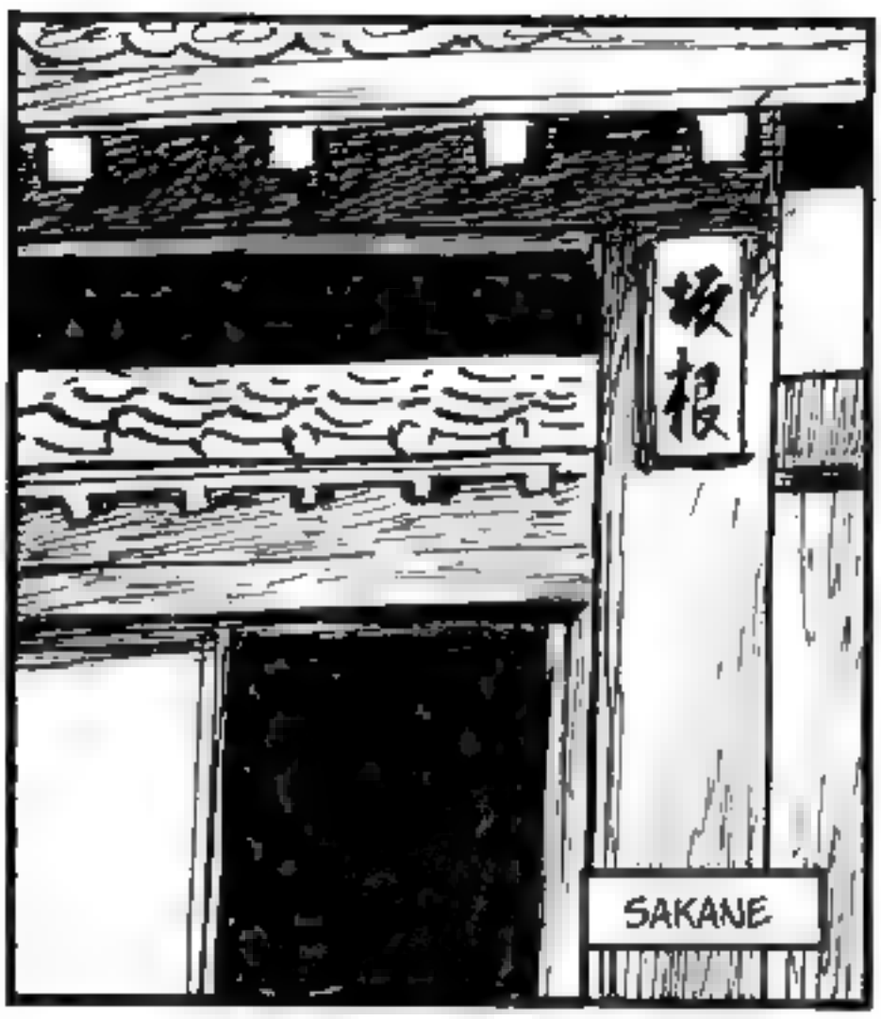
the fiftieth

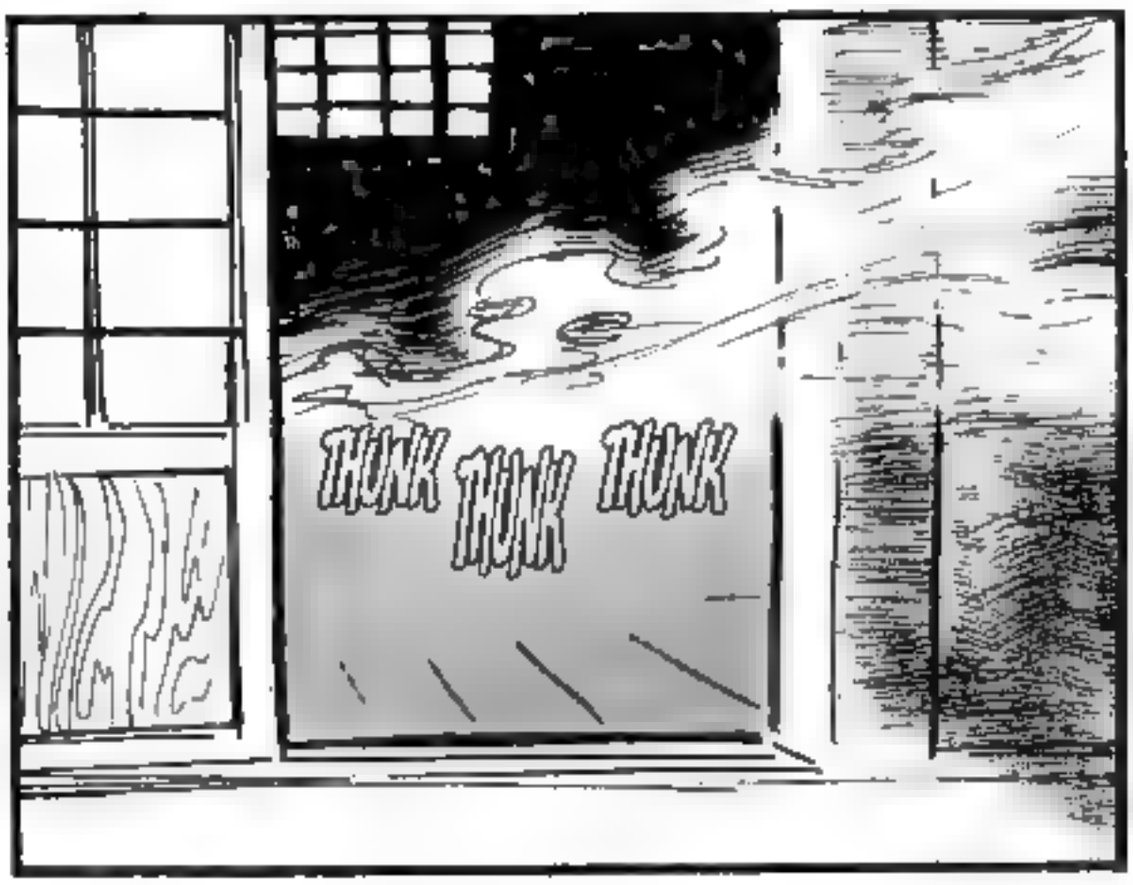
A Couple of Jitte

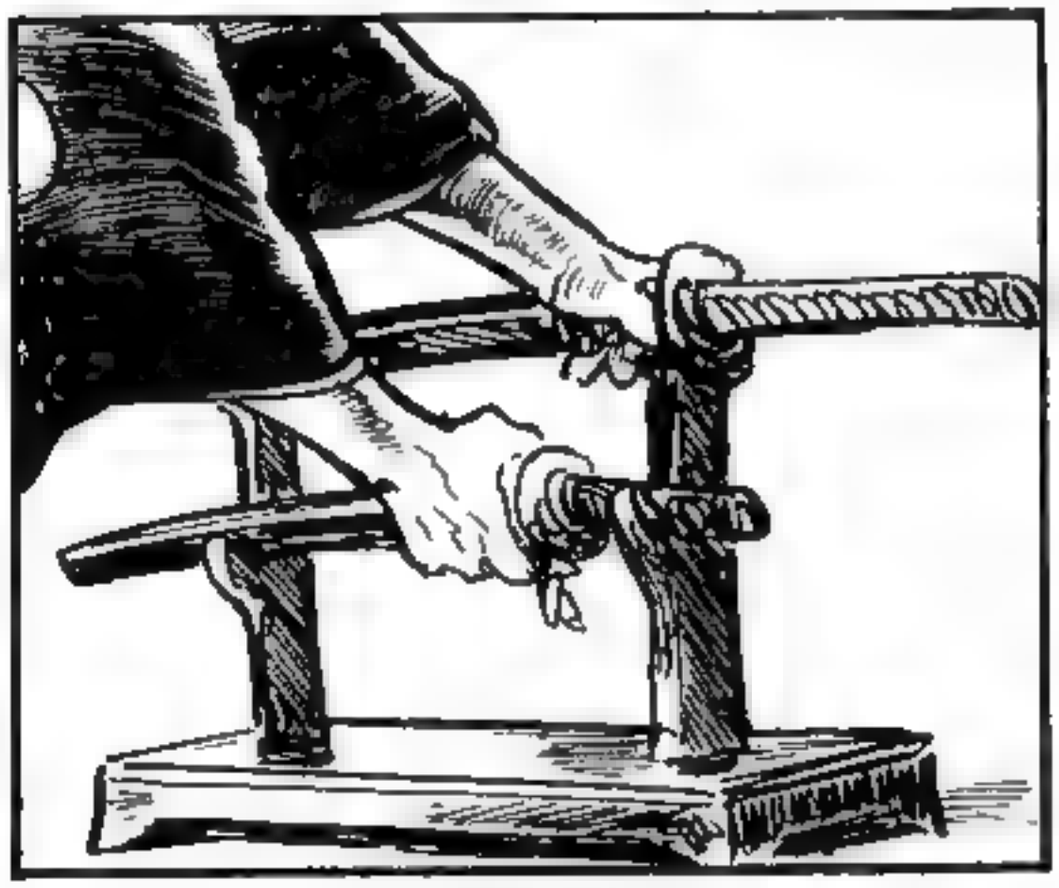

北町奉行所
NORTHERN TOWN
COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE


GRUMBLE
GRUMBLE
GRUMBLE
GRUMBLE
HURMPH




坂根
SAKANE


THUNK THUNK THUNK



OHHH...

I'M IN *TROUBLE.*

GASP!

YOU FOOL. WHY'RE YOU SO SURPRISED? IT'S JUST YOUR *HUSBAND*, THAT'S ALL!

BUT... I DIDN'T THINK THERE WAS ANYONE HOME!

COULDN'T YOU HAVE AT LEAST SAID THAT YOU'RE BACK?

OKAY, I'M BACK.

IT'S *TOO LATE* NOW.

MOST PATROLMEN...

...COME HOME FROM WORK WITH STIFF LEGS.

...
...

IT'S BECALISE THEY WALK FIVE *R!* A DAY.

BUT IF I DO *THIS* FOR YOU FROM NOW ON...

UH, DEAR?

...
...

WHAT'S WRONG?

...
...

KICH KICH

HEY! THAT *TICKLES!* S-STOP IT!

SOMETHING HAPPENED, DIDN'T IT?!

NOPE, NOTHING AT ALL!

DEAR!
HUH?

IT'S NOT GOOD FOR YOU IF YOU *THINK* WHILE YOU *EAT*.
UH-HUH.

THERE *WAS* SOMETHING, WASN'T THERE?
NO.

OH MY!

IT'S BECAUSE YOUR THOUGHTS ARE *SOMEWHERE ELSE.*

SHINKO...

YES?

YOU...

OH, NEVER MIND

NO. WHAT IS IT THAT YOU'RE HOLDING BACK?!

IT'S NOTHING...

...ABSOLUTELY *NOTHING.*

WHAT IS IT?!

CHESTNUT RICE WOULD BE NICE.

I'M *WORRIED* ABOUT YOU!

WHAT IS IT?!

I *CARE* ABOUT YOU...

I-I WORRY ABOUT YOU *DAY* AND *NIGHT!*

IT'S *NOTHING.* DON'T *EXAGGERATE.*

A-AS WE GET FURTHER INTO *AUTUMN*, PEOPLE START *WORRYING* ABOUT THIS.

UH, YEAH.

'CAUSE IT'S *AUTUMN.*

WORRYING, HUH?

Y-YOU CAN'T BE *WORRIED* ABOUT *ANOTHER* WOMAN...?

W-WHAT? THAT'S *RIDICULOUS*...

THEY SAY PEOPLE GET IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE IN AUTUMN...

SNIFF SNIFF

W-WHAT...?

IF YOU'VE GOT *THAT* WHITE POWDER SMELL...

S-STOP IT!

FLOP FLOP

PLONK PLONK

G-GOING TO BED *ALREADY?*

YEAH, *TOGETHER!*

THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I'LL KNOW FOR *SURE!*

SWOOSH SWOOSH

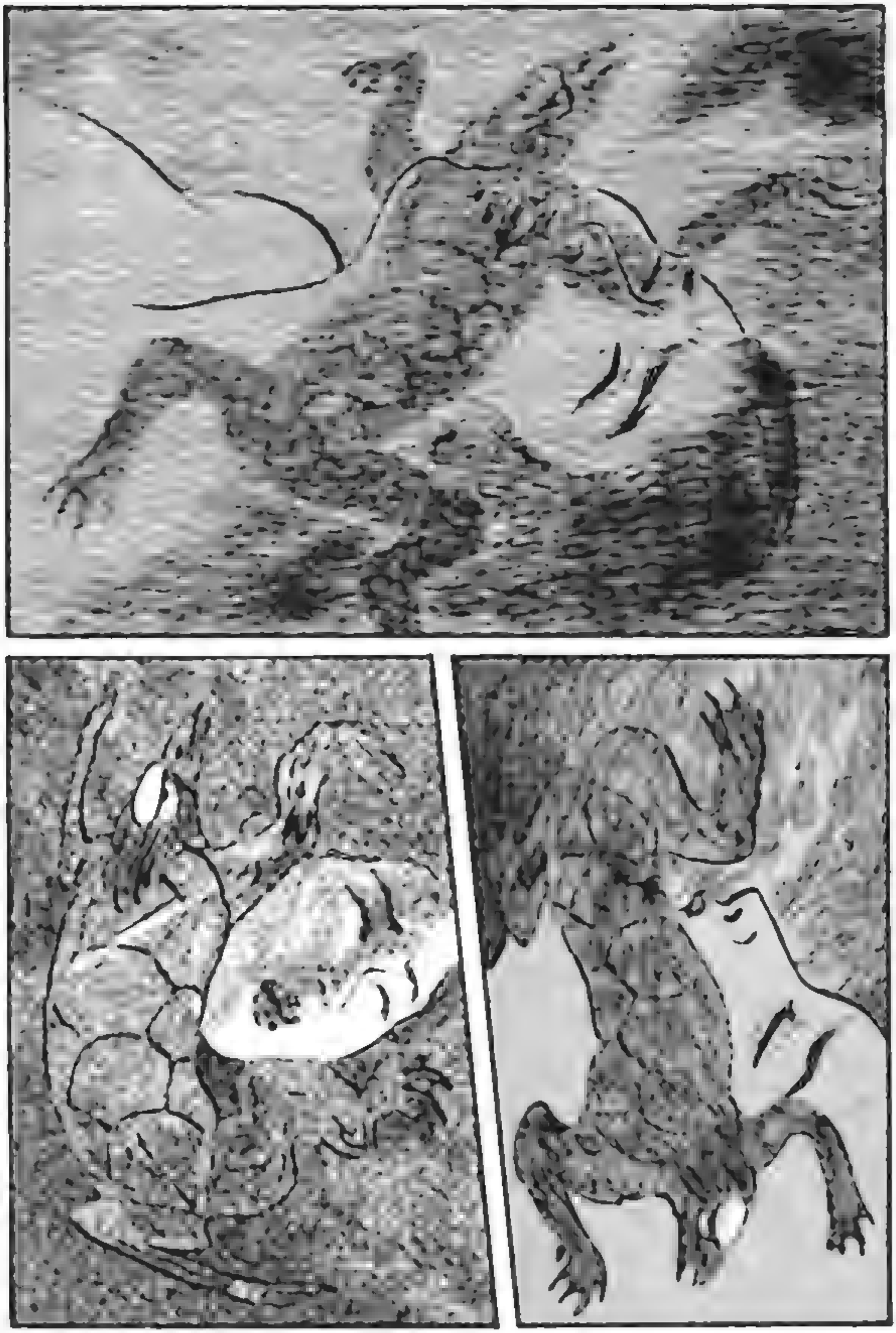
TH-THAT'S *SILLY.*

THERE'S *NO* REASON YOU SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT ME WITH ANOTHER WOMAN...

SWOOSH

SWOOSH

COME ON!



AHHH
AHHH
AHHH

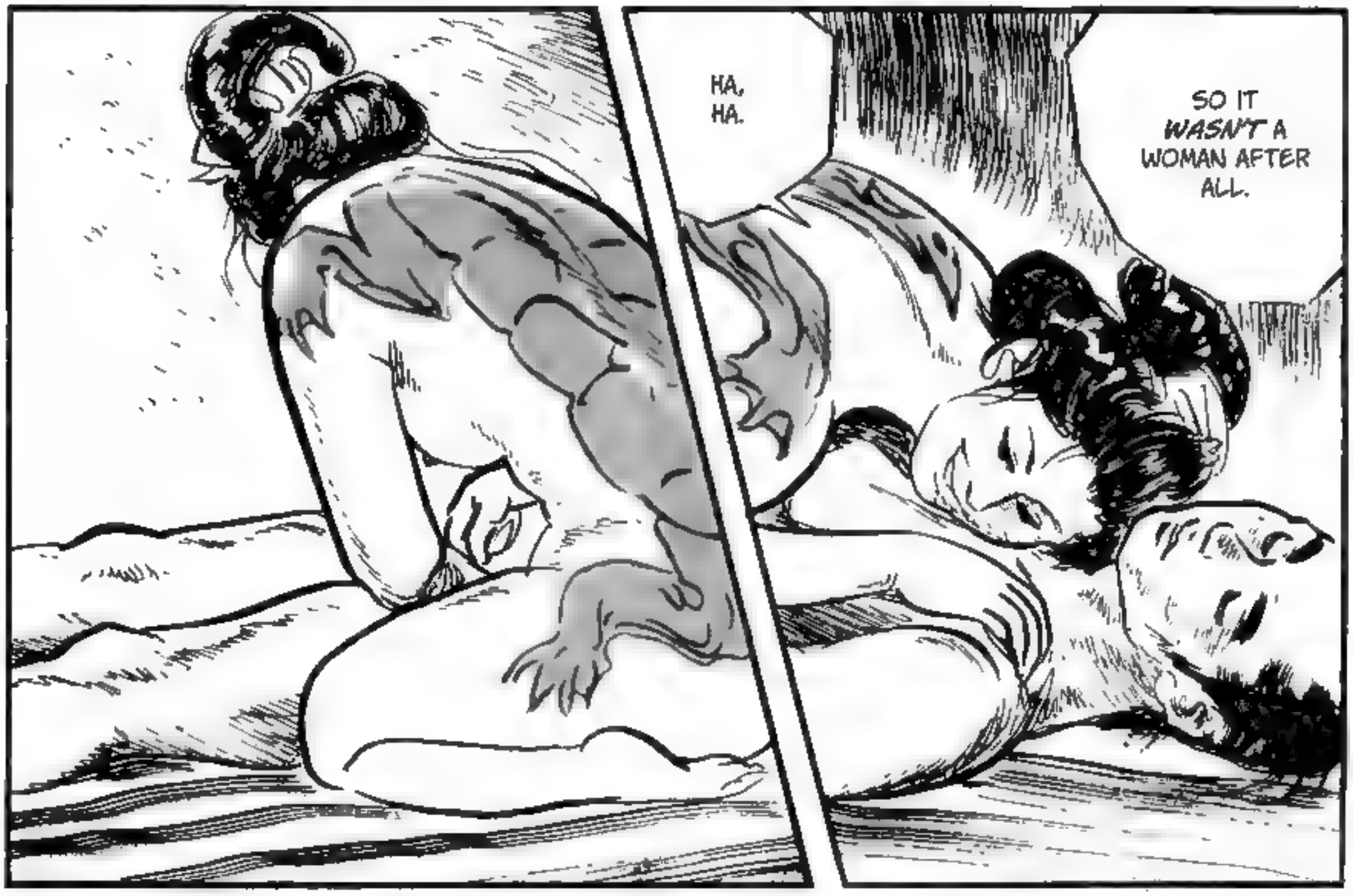
AH
AH
AH
AH

FSHH
FSHH

AH
AH

AHHH
AHHH

OHHH
HHH
AH
AHHH
AHHH
AHH


HA, HA.
SO IT *WASN'T* A WOMAN AFTER ALL.

STOP WEARING ME OUT.

NOT YET. ONE MORE TIME...

N-NO .. YOU *COULDN'T*...

UNLESS YOU *TELL* ME...

S-STOP IT...

I *TOLD* YOU TO *STOP* IT...

AH AH

I CAN'T TAKE IT!

AH AH

SO, WHAT *WAS* IT?

GET UP, SHINKO.

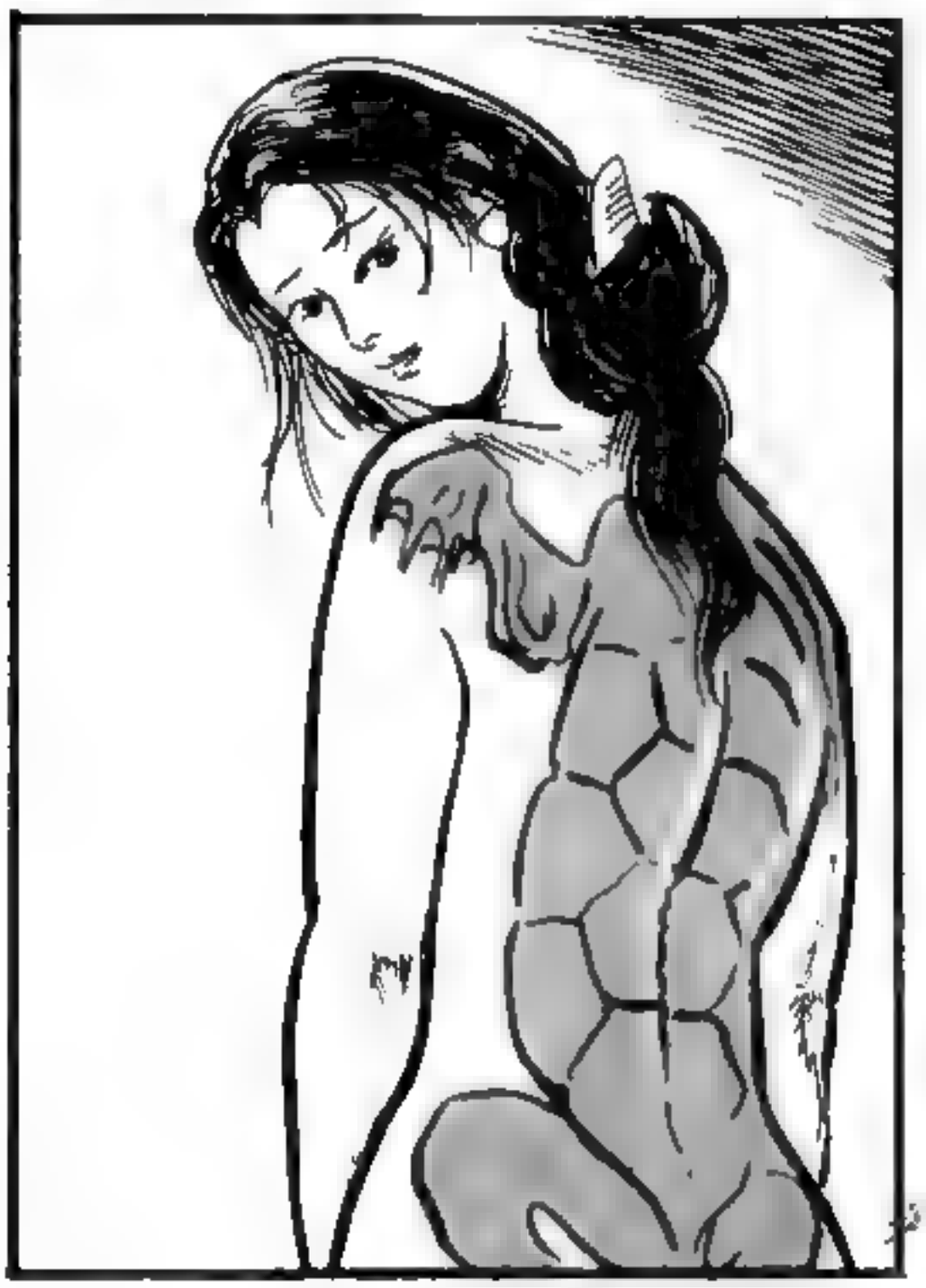
HUH?

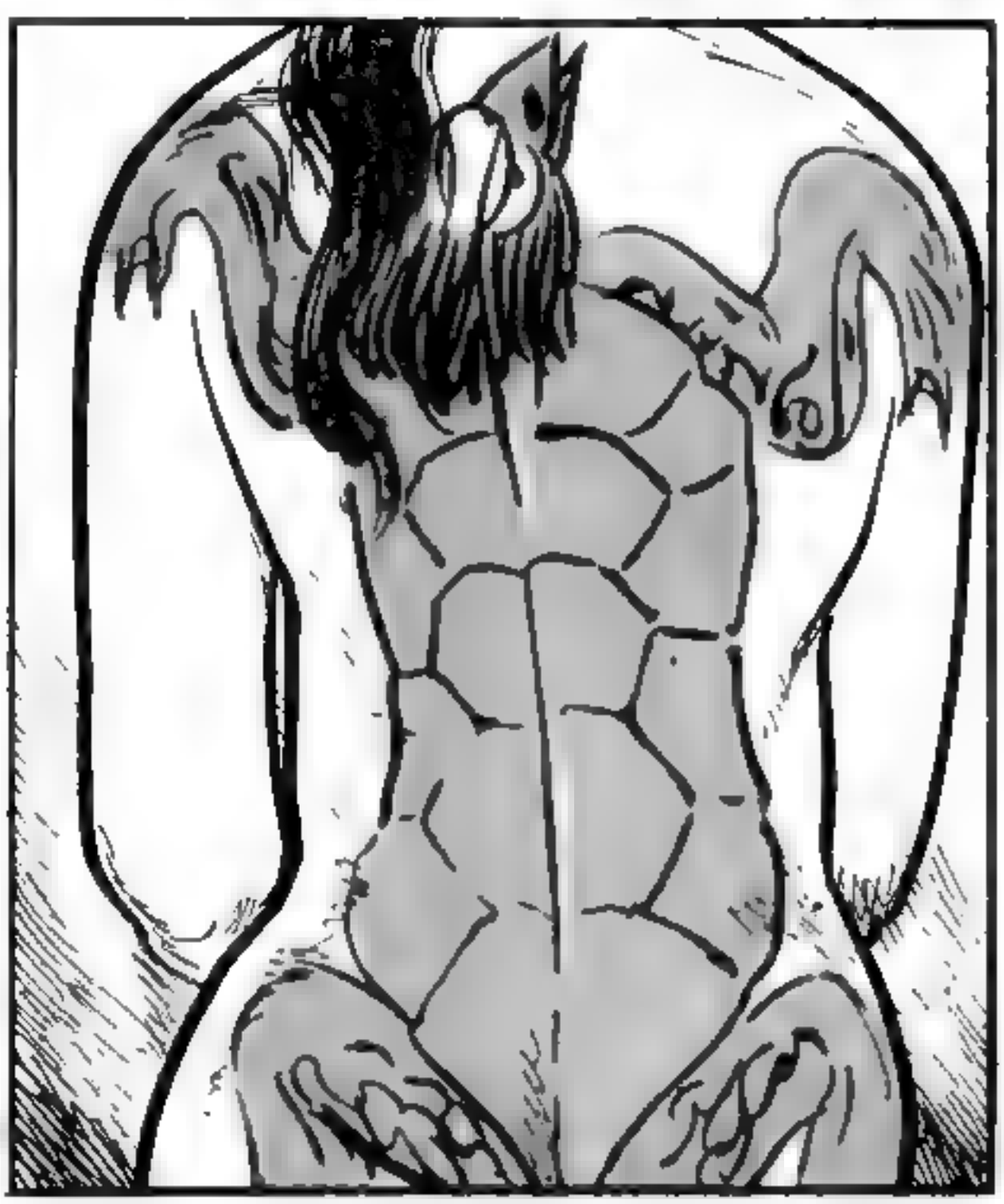
GET UP.

SHOW ME YOUR *BACK.*

NO... IT'S KINDA *EMBARRASSING.*
AND I DON'T LIKE BEING SO *FORMAL...*

NEVER MIND. SHOW ME YOUR *BACK.*





SO MAYBE YOU *COULD* BE ONE AFTER ALL...

COULD BE WHAT? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?!

WELL...

THE TOWN COMMISSIONER AND MURAKAMI THE HEAD LIEUTENANT TALKED TO ME TODAY...

THEY WANT YOU TO TAKE UP THE *JITTE*...

WHAT?!

LATELY THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF CASES INVOLVING *DOMESTIC* PROBLEMS BETWEEN *MEN* AND *WOMEN*.

THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE IS HAVING A *HARD* TIME. THEY *NEED* A WOMAN ON THE FORCE.

WE MEN CAN HANDLE THE *SURFACE* STUFF. BUT THERE ARE *DEEPER* THINGS WE *CAN'T* HANDLE...LIKE GETTING INTO A *WOMAN'S* HEART.

THERE ARE *LOTS* OF TIMES WHEN WE CAN'T TELL WHETHER WOMEN ARE TELLING THE *TRUTH* OR ARE *LYING.*

BUT *YOU* COULD DO THAT.

YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF *GUTS.* YOU CAN GET TO THE *BOTTOM* OF THINGS. AND YOU'RE VERY *SKILLED.*

...
...

I HAVE TO GIVE AN ANSWER *TOMORROW.*

IT'LL BE *DANGEROUS.* WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS TO YOU?

BUT I WOULDN'T HAVE YOU...IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE. I OWE 'EM ONE.

I'LL DO IT.

IF THEY'RE OKAY WITH SOMEONE LIKE ME. I OWE THEM FOR CLEARING MY RECORD. IT'S THE *LEAST* I COULD DO.

I WANT TO *HELP* OTHER PEOPLE IN ANY WAY I CAN.

...OR SO I'LL TELL *THEM.*

HA, HA. THAT WAY, I CAN ALWAYS BE RIGHT BESIDE *YOU.*

WE CAN EVEN *DIE* TOGETHER...

THAT'S WHY...

IT'LL BE NICE. I WON'T BE ALONE WORRYING ABOUT YOU ANYMORE. I CAN'T *STAND* THAT.

YOU WON'T JUST BE WORKING UNDER *ME*.

ALL RIGHT, THEN I'LL *RESIGN*.

HRMPH... THIS IS GETTING *ABSURD*.

IT'S *OKAY*.

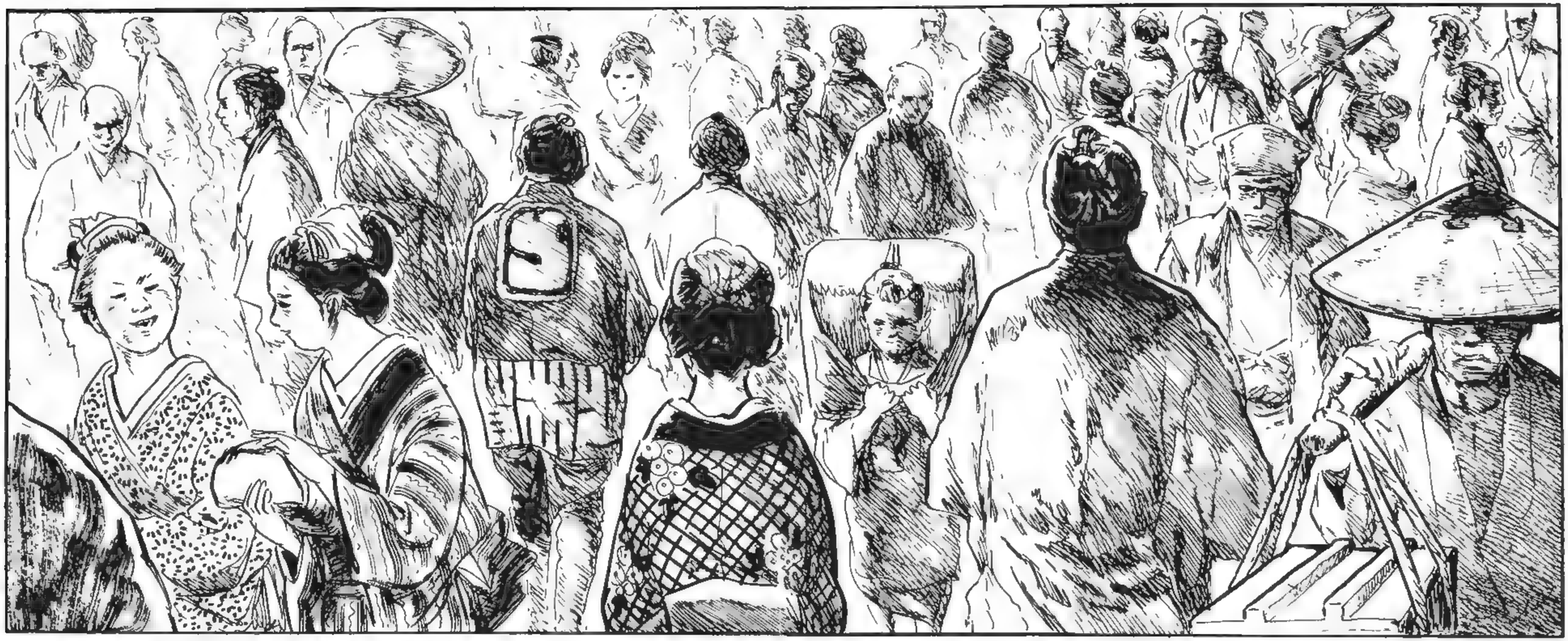
THAT'S ALSO FINE WITH *ME*.

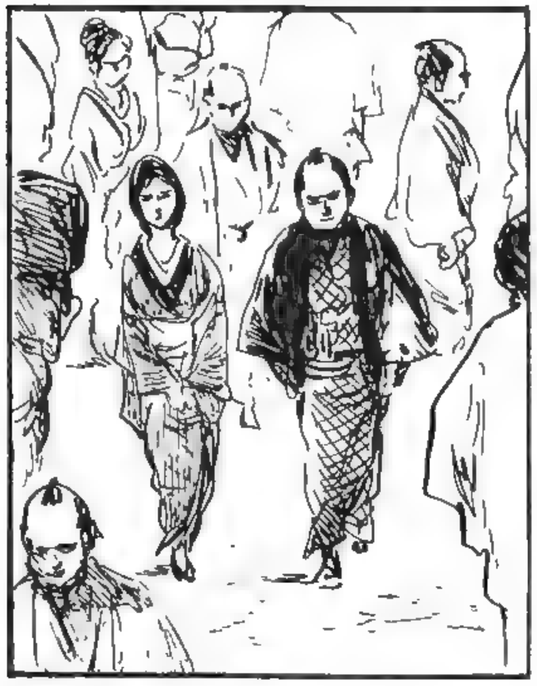
OHHH...

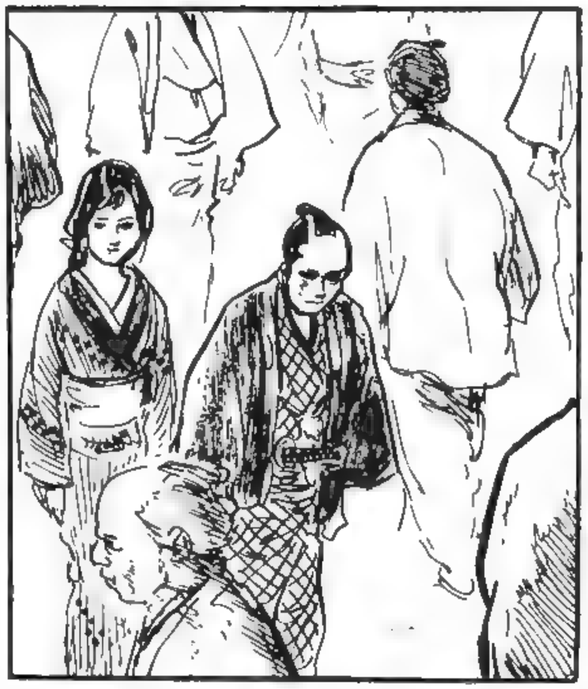
THEN AGAIN...

WHAT?!

IT'S *OKAY*... *OKAY*... *REALLY* OKAY... YOU'LL BE A BIG HELP.







DEAR...

STOP STICKING TO ME, STUPID I *TOLD* YOU TO WALK FROM A DISTANCE.

BUT...

GOOD DAY, SIR.

HI.

YOU'RE WELCOME. MY HUSBAND SHOULD BE THANKING *YOU!*

Y-YOU FOOL! THAT'S *ENOUGH!*

WHO'S GONNA BOTHER TO GREET *EVERY SINGLE* PERSON?

A-AND THEN YOU THANKED HIM *FOR ME!*

THERE ARE LOTS OF PEOPLE WHO DON'T EVEN KNOW MY *NAME!*

THEY'RE NOT GREETING *ME*. THEY'RE BOWING TO MY *JITTE!*

HAVEN'T YOU AT LEAST FIGURED OUT *THAT* MUCH, YOU DUMMY?!

S... SORRY.

HUH?! YOUR *JITTE*...

UH-OH...

YOUR *JITTE*'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THERE! PUT IT IN BACK! IN *BACK*!

ONLY *LIEUTENANTS* CAN WEAR THEIRS IN *FRONT*.

BUT HOW AM I GONNA GET IT IN AN EMERGENCY?

WILL YOU BE TOTALLY USELESS IN AN EMERGENCY?! JUST PUT IT SOMEWHERE WHERE PEOPLE CAN'T SEE IT!

ALL RIGHT.

HOW CAN I DO MY JOB WITH *YOU* AROUND?! I HAVE TO KEEP LOOKING OUT FOR YOU. I'M *EXHAUSTED.*

YOU *TWIT.*

S... SORRY.

I *TOLD* YOU TO KEEP YOUR DISTANCE!

OKAY.

GUARDHOUSE

WAIT *OUTSIDE.*

GOOD DAY, MA'AM.

DO YOU HAVE YOUR *JITTE* NOW?

YES. TODAY'S MY *FIRST PATROL.*

NICE TO MEET YOU.

MY PLEASURE.

PLEASE DON'T CALL ME "MA'AM."

OKAY, SO WHAT IF I CALLED YOU... *"KAPPA"*?

YEAH, DO THAT.

THAT'S THE SPIRIT.

HA, HA.

ANYWAY, COME IN. YOU FIRST.

BUT HE TOLD ME TO WAIT OUTSIDE.

EMBARRASSED, AREN'T YA?

I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW YOUR HUSBAND FEELS OR ANYTHING, BUT IF YOU'RE GONNA BE LIKE *THAT*, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO DO YOUR JOB.

LET ME HANDLE IT. COME ON IN.

THIS IS SAKANE'S WIFE. SHE'S TAKEN UP THE *JITTE* AND SHE'LL BE WORKING WITH US.
NICE TO MEET YOU.

OUR PLEASURE.

WE'RE HONORED TO HAVE YOUR COMPANY.

WE'VE *HEARD* ABOUT YOU.

I'M UNDERCOVER PATROLMAN ITŌ YAHACHI. WE WISH YOU THE BEST.

THANK YOU.

YOU DID A *GREAT* JOB WITH THE LADY "KANSUKE" CASE.

YOU HAVE *SUCH* A GOOD WIFE. YOU'RE A *LUCKY MAN!*

SLAP!

*SEE VOL. 7.

OH...I'M *TIRED.* WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN *NOW?* I'M *WORRIED.*

ENOUGH OF THAT. HURRY UP AND MAKE DINNER.

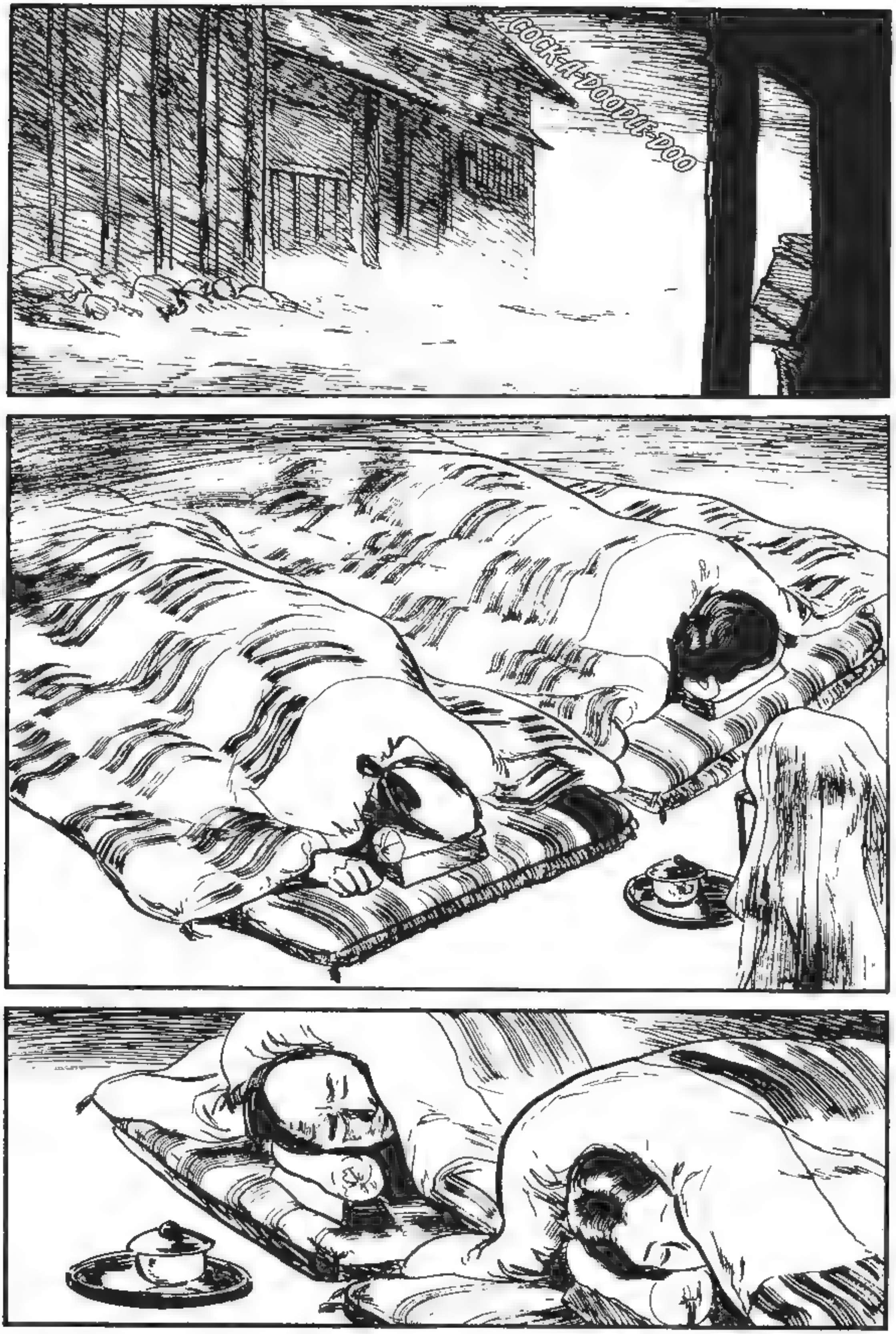
OKAY.

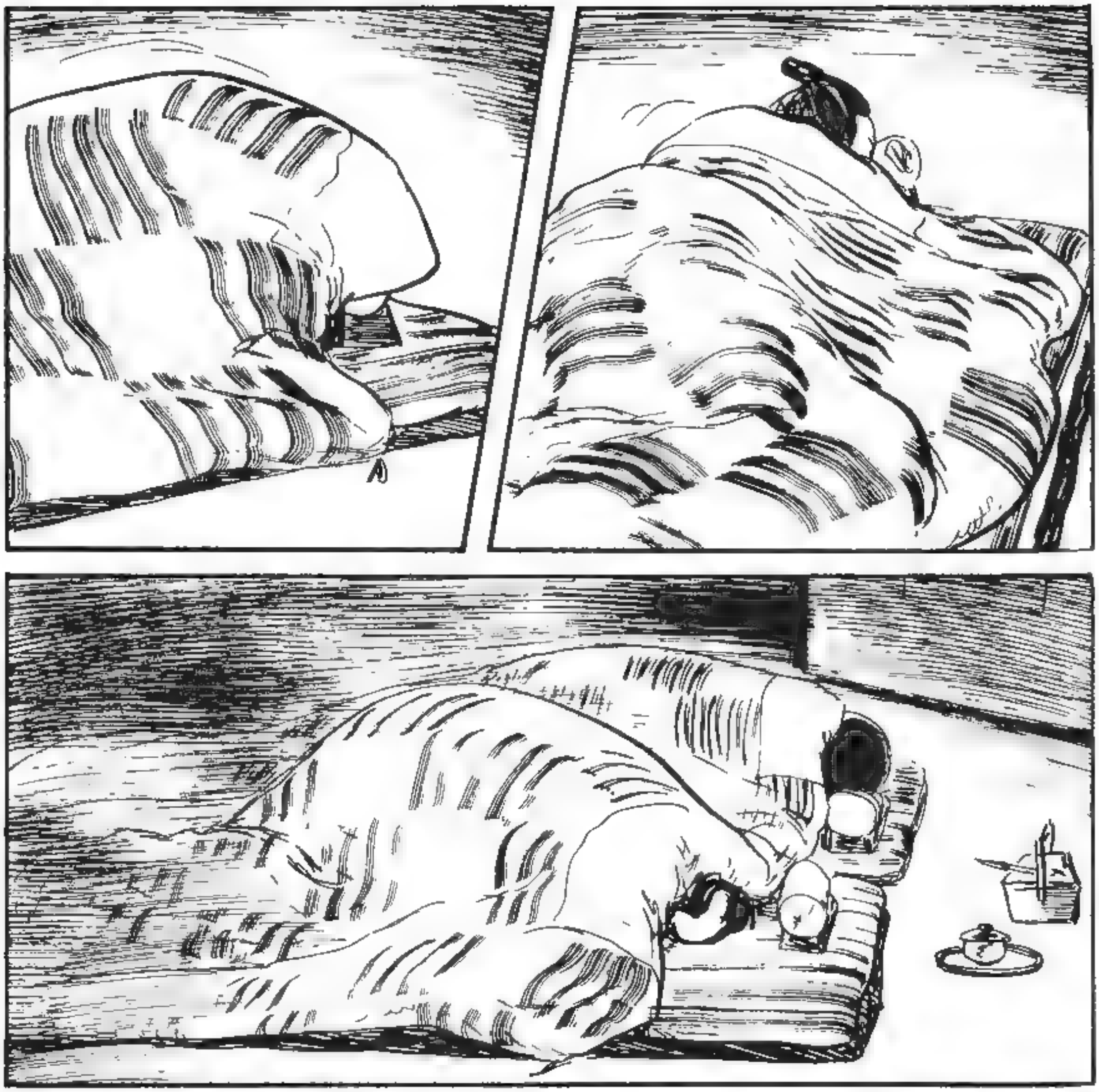
CHOP CHOP CHOP

NOT READY YET?

Y-YES. IT'S READY NOW.

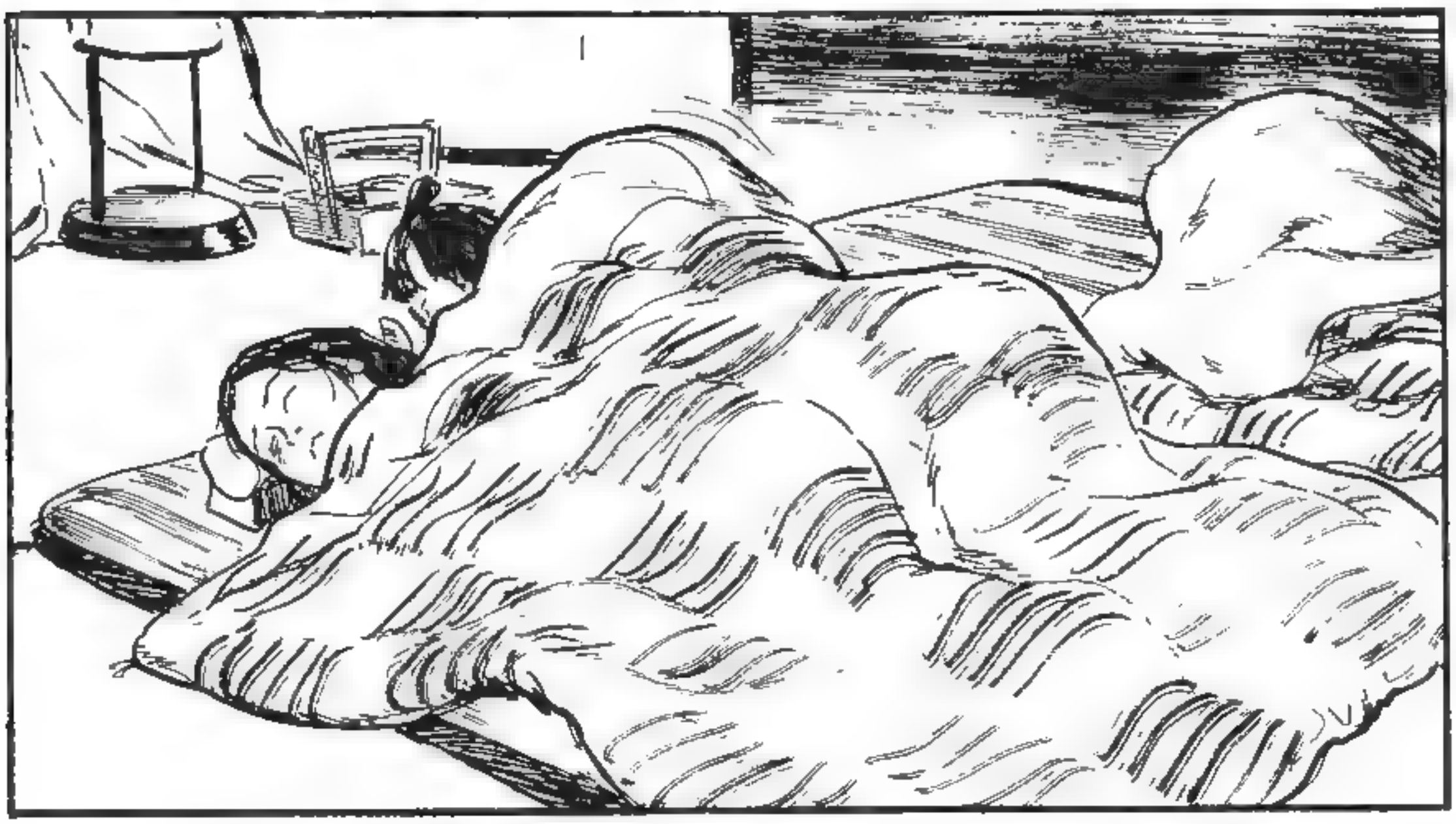
人體懲罰指南
A GUIDE TO
PUNISHMENT


COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO



BRRR...

BRRR...



OH... WHAT'S WRONG?

I'M *FREEZING* THIS MORNING. CAN YOU WARM ME UP?

NO, I'M TOO...

YOUR *SMELL*...

SNIFF SNIFF... SO *STRONG*... YOU HAVEN'T BEEN WASHING YOUR *HAIR*, HAVE YOU?

I DON'T HAVE *TIME* FOR THAT KIND OF STUFF.

OH!

NO. I'M TOO SLEEPY...

I'M NOT GONNA *DO* ANYTHING. JUST LET ME *IN*. I'M *COLD*.

I'LL JUST LEAVE IT IN THERE AND GO BACK TO SLEEP...

BE QUIET ALREADY!

IT'LL BE OKAY. IT'LL BE OKAY.

D... DON'T MOVE IT.

I KNOW.

AHHH!

AHHH!

AH
AH
AH
AH
AH!
OHH!!

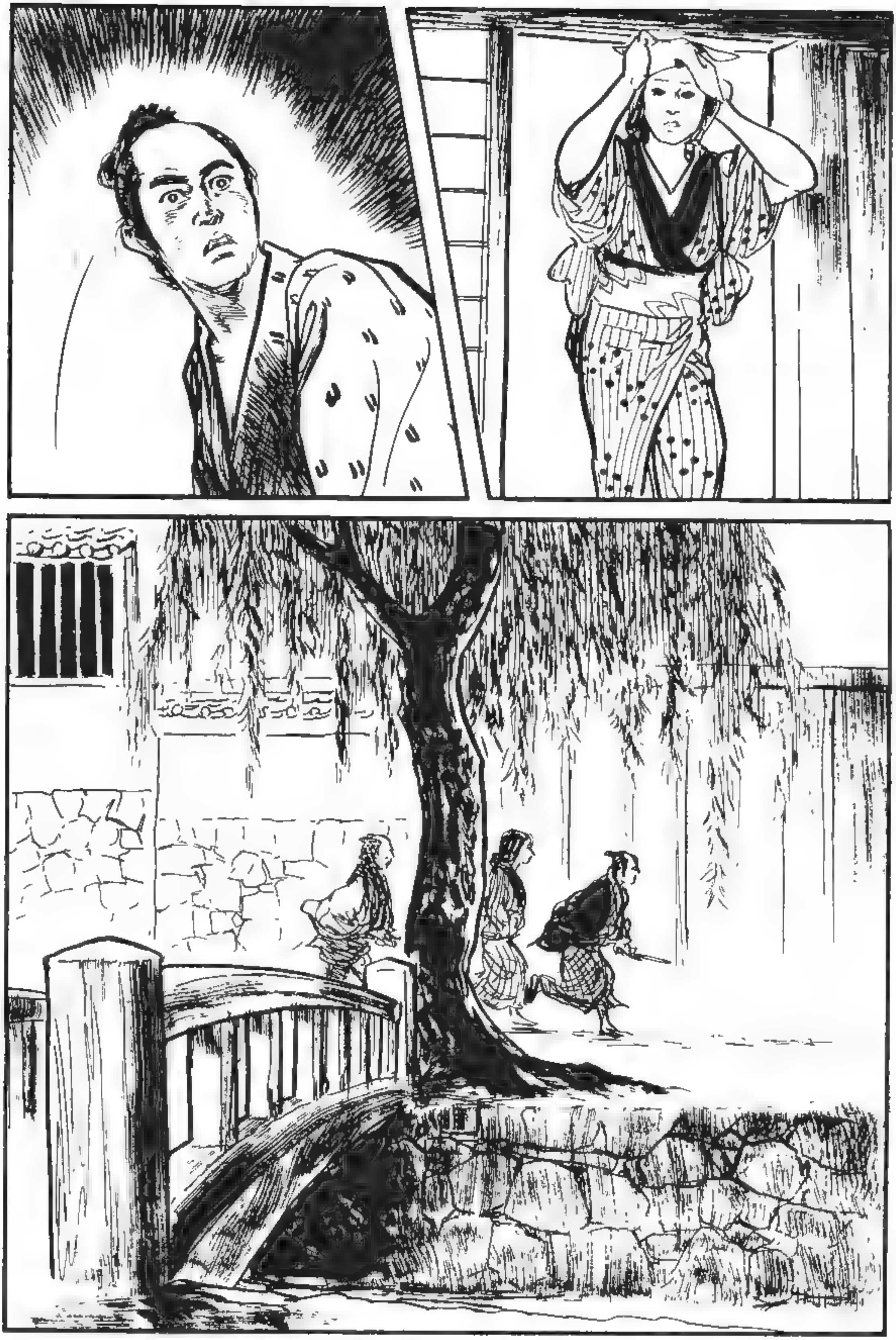
CHOP CHOP CHOP

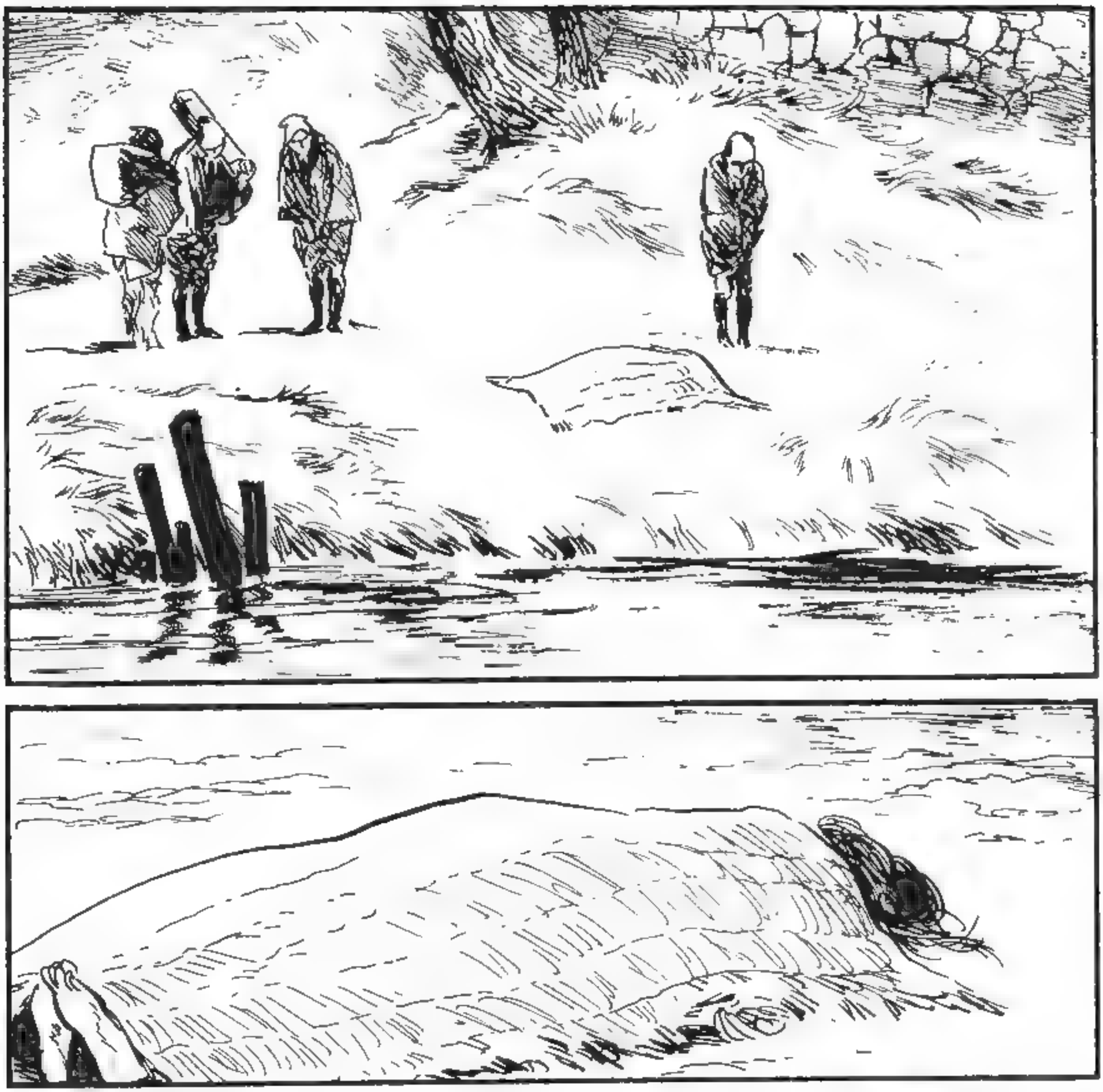
KERTHUNK

KERTHUNK

CHOP CHOP

THERE'S BEEN A *MURDER!*





JUDGING FROM HER WOUND, THE MURDER WEAPON MUST HAVE BEEN *SMALL* AND *THIN*. A *HIRAUCHI* HAIRPIN, OR SOMETHING *LIKE* ONE...

THERE MUST BE A CLUE AROUND THERE SOMEWHERE.

SH-SHINKO...

H-HOW'D YOU KNOW *THAT*? WHERE'D YOU FIND OUT...

WELL, UM, ACTUALLY, ER...

IT WAS REALLY *COLD* LAST NIGHT, SO...

THERE'S SOMETHING *ODD* ABOUT THE CORPSE. IT'S *NAKED*.

THAT'S WHY I DON'T THINK THE WOUND'LL BE OF MUCH HELP.

TH-THAT'S WHAT *SHE* SAID, BUT I'M PRETTY SURE ABOUT THAT TOO.

THAT'S WHY WE NEED TO EXAMINE THE CORPSE AFTER COVERING THE CORPSE WITH *KASUZU* AND POURING VINEGAR SAKE ON IT.

THEN WE COVER IT WITH A STRAW MAT, WAIT A COUPLE OF HOURS, AND USE WARM WATER TO PUT SOME MORE *KASUZU* ON IT. THEN THE *REAL* WOUNDS WILL SHOW UP... OR SO *SHE* SAID. BUT THAT *IS* WHAT *I* THINK TOO.

UH-HUH.

THAT'S *EXACTLY* RIGHT.

WE'VE BEEN *CARELESS.*

THAT'S WHAT'S WRITTEN IN *A GUIDE TO PUNISHMENT!* I SHOULD'VE KNOWN BETTER...
I WAS *WRONG* TO JUMP TO CONCLUSIONS.

NO, I'M JUST *EMBARRASSED*
AND YOUR WIFE'S *QUITE* KNOWLEDGEABLE.
THANKS...

OKAY, WE'VE CHECKED OUT THE *CRIME SCENE*. NOW HURRY UP AND TAKE THE CORPSE TO THE STATION WHERE WE CAN EXAMINE THE WOUND AGAIN.

USING *KASUZU*.

RATTLE

RATTLE

RATTLE RATTLE

WHAT IS IT?

COULD YOU STAY BACK HERE A MOMENT?

WHAT'S WRONG, SHINKO?!

WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY THAT IT WAS *YOUR* IDEA JUST NOW?

WELL, BECAUSE IT WAS *YOUR* IDEA, RIGHT? *I* DIDN'T KNOW THAT WOUNDS WERE SUPPOSED TO BE EXAMINED WITH *KASUZU.*

BUT I WANTED *YOU* TO GET THE CREDIT...

...OTHERWISE I WOULDN'T HAVE SAID ANYTHING!

I UNDERSTAND.

FROM NOW ON, SAY THAT EVERYTHING'S *YOUR* IDEA.

OTHERWISE, *I'M* GOING TO BE DISAPPOINTED.

LOOK, I SEE WHERE YOU'RE COMING FROM, BUT...

THAT LADY WASN'T *KILLED*. I THINK SHE COMMITTED *SUICIDE*.

W-WHAT?

THAT'S *STUPID*. WHY WOULD SHE KILL HERSELF *NAKED* IN THE DEAD OF WINTER?!

TO MAKE IT *LOOK* LIKE A MURDER, OF COURSE.

SO WHAT ABOUT HER *CLOTHES*? THE *MURDER WEAPON*?

DON'T TELL ME THAT HER *GHOST* TOOK THEM AWAY AFTER SHE DIED!

I WAS THINKING ABOUT THAT JUST NOW.

ENOUGH ALREADY.

JUST BECAUSE YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT USING *KASUZU* DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU'RE ON A *ROLL*.

IF SHE HAD STABBED HERSELF IN THE THROAT, HER CORPSE WOULD HAVE BOTH HANDS CLENCHED, ELBOWS BENT, STRUGGLING TO CONTRACT...

...AND THAT WOULD STILL BE TRUE IF THE CORPSE HAD WOUNDS ON BOTH HANDS...WHICH IT *DID*. THERE WERE FAINT WOUNDS LEFT FROM PULLING OUT A BLADE.

AND EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD A WOUND IN HER *THROAT*...

I THINK SHE HAD BEEN STABBED FROM THE *BOTTOM* UP!

IF *YOU* WERE TO KILL A WOMAN, DEAR, HOW WOULD *YOU* DO IT?!

WITH A THRUST INTO HER *HEART*...

RIGHT.

THERE'S SOMETHING *WEIRD* ABOUT THIS.

THAT BOAT... WHY'S ITS MOORING ROPE...

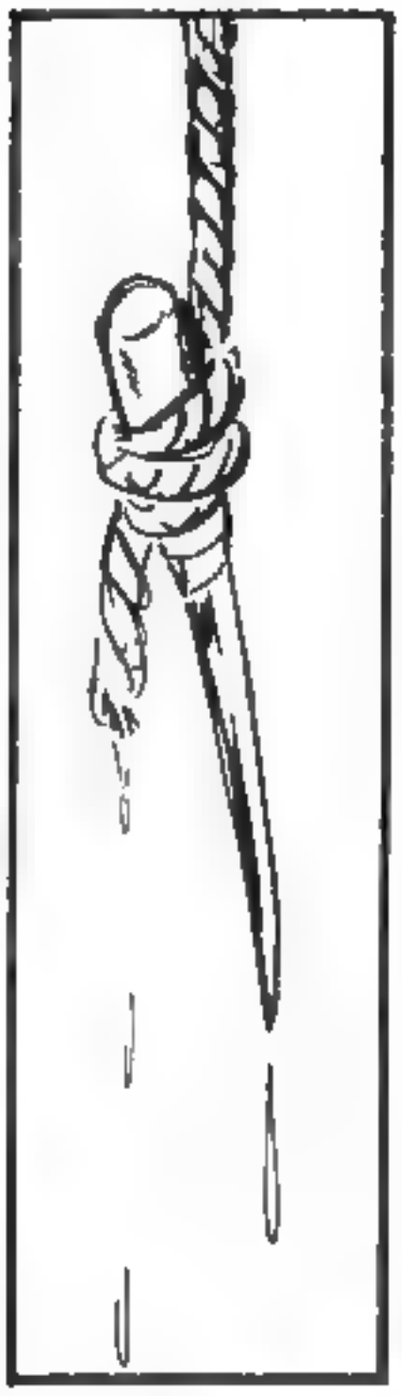
I GOT IT!

SH-SHINKO!
WH-WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!

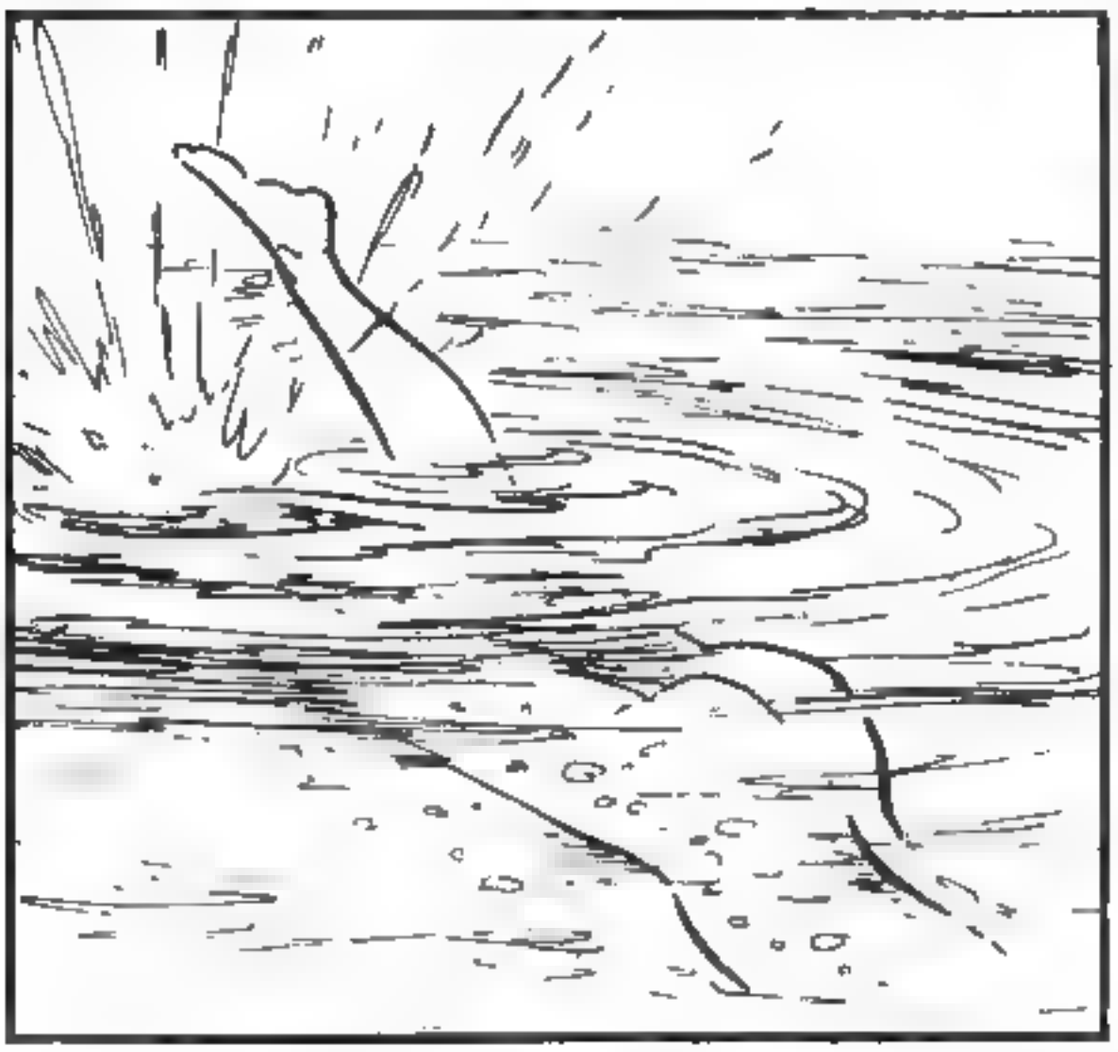
YOU'RE NOT GONNA GO...
...TO THE BOTTOM OF THE RIVER?!
THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I'M GONNA DO.

YOU *FOOL!* IT'S *FREEZING!* YOU'LL *DIE!*

BUT I'M *SHINKO THE KAPPA!*



IT WAS THERE!



JUST AS I THOUGHT!

SHE UNTIED THE MOORING ROPE AT FULL TIDE, TIED A DAGGER TO IT, AND STABBED HERSELF.

I THINK SHE STILL HAD ENOUGH STRENGTH TO PULL OUT THE DAGGER AND LET GO OF IT.

AT LOW TIDE, WHEN THE BOAT WENT OUT, IT DRAGGED THE DAGGER WITH IT INTO THE RIVER.

SHE HAD TAKEN OFF HER CLOTHES, WEIGHED THEM DOWN WITH ROCKS, AND DUMPED THEM INTO THE RIVER.

Y-YOU... HOW'D YOU...

SHE WAS *PREGNANT*. I COULD TELL BECAUSE HER ABDOMEN WAS *HARD*.

SHE SET UP THE GUY WHO DUMPED HER AS THE CULPRIT.

MAKE SURE *YOU* GET THE CREDIT.

UH, OKAY.

GOOD JOB, MA'AM.

THE COMMISSIONER HIMSELF WAS QUITE *IMPRESSED* BY YOUR *KNOWLEDGE* AND *INSIGHT*.

EVERYTHING TURNED OUT *JUST* THE WAY YOU THOUGHT IT DID. NOW YOU'VE GOT QUITE A *REPUTATION*.

BUT I TOLD HIM TO TAKE THE CREDIT.

I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL, MA'AM. A HUSBAND DOESN'T FEEL TOO GOOD WHEN *OTHERS* PRAISE HIS WIFE.

THEY WONDER WHY HE'S GOT SUCH A GREAT WIFE. THEY GET *JEALOUS*.

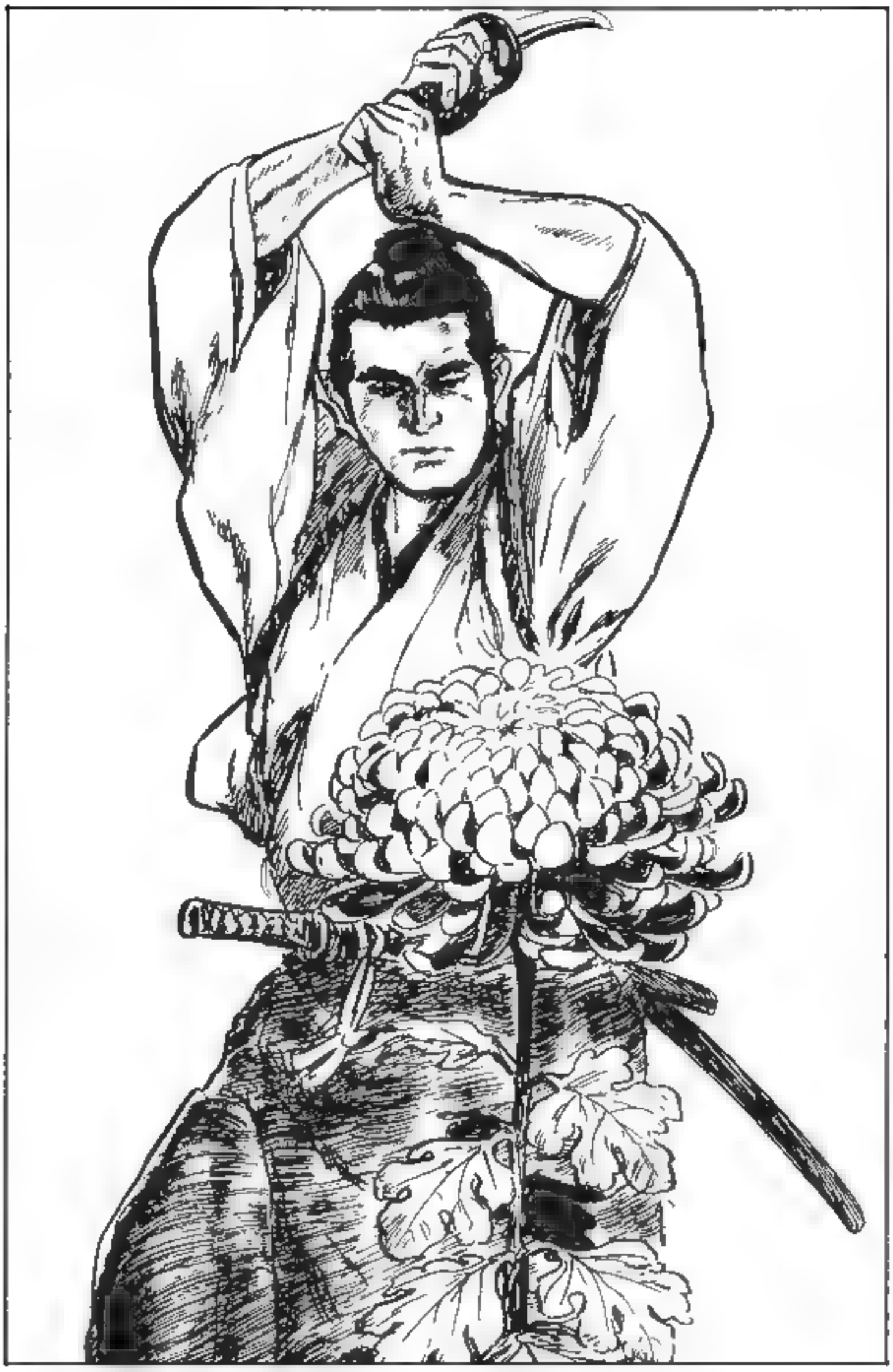
BUT DOES IT REALLY MATTER WHO GETS THE CREDIT?

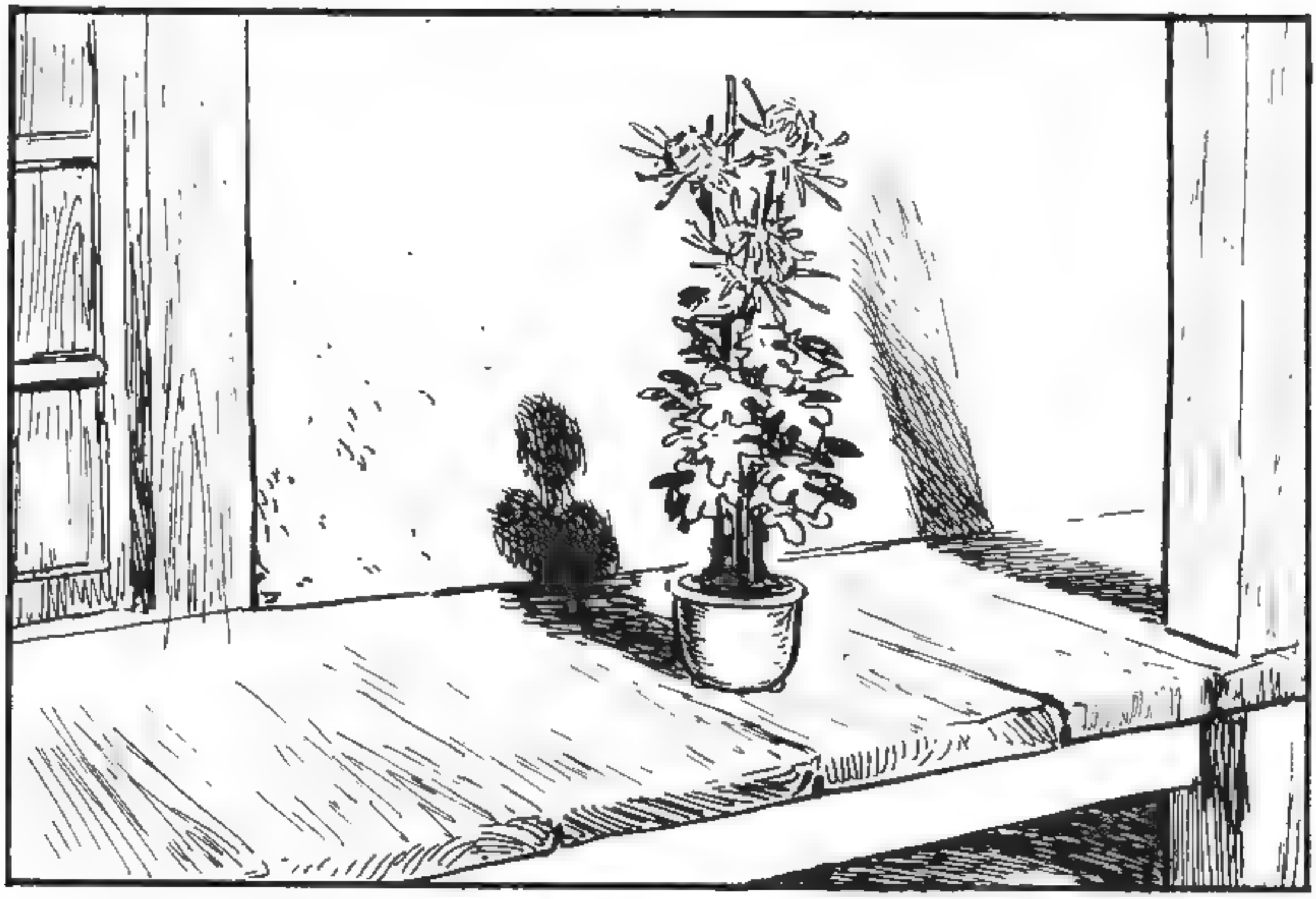
AFTER ALL, YOU'RE *A COUPLE OF JITTE*.

A COUPLE OF JITTE...

the fifty-first

The Chrysanthemum Head





YOU DON'T WANT ANY PAPER ON YOUR FACE 'CAUSE YOU WANNA SEE YOUR CHRYSANTHEMUM BEFORE YOU GO, RIGHT?

YEAH. PLEASE, I BEG YOU.

WELL, IF *THAT'S* ALL YOU WANT, I CAN'T SEE HOW ANYONE COULD CRITICIZE THAT.

THANK YOU. SORRY TO CAUSE YOU TROUBLE.

IT'S *AMAZING* THAT YOU WERE ABLE TO PUT YOUR *HEART* AND *SOUL* INTO GROWING THIS IN *PRISON*...

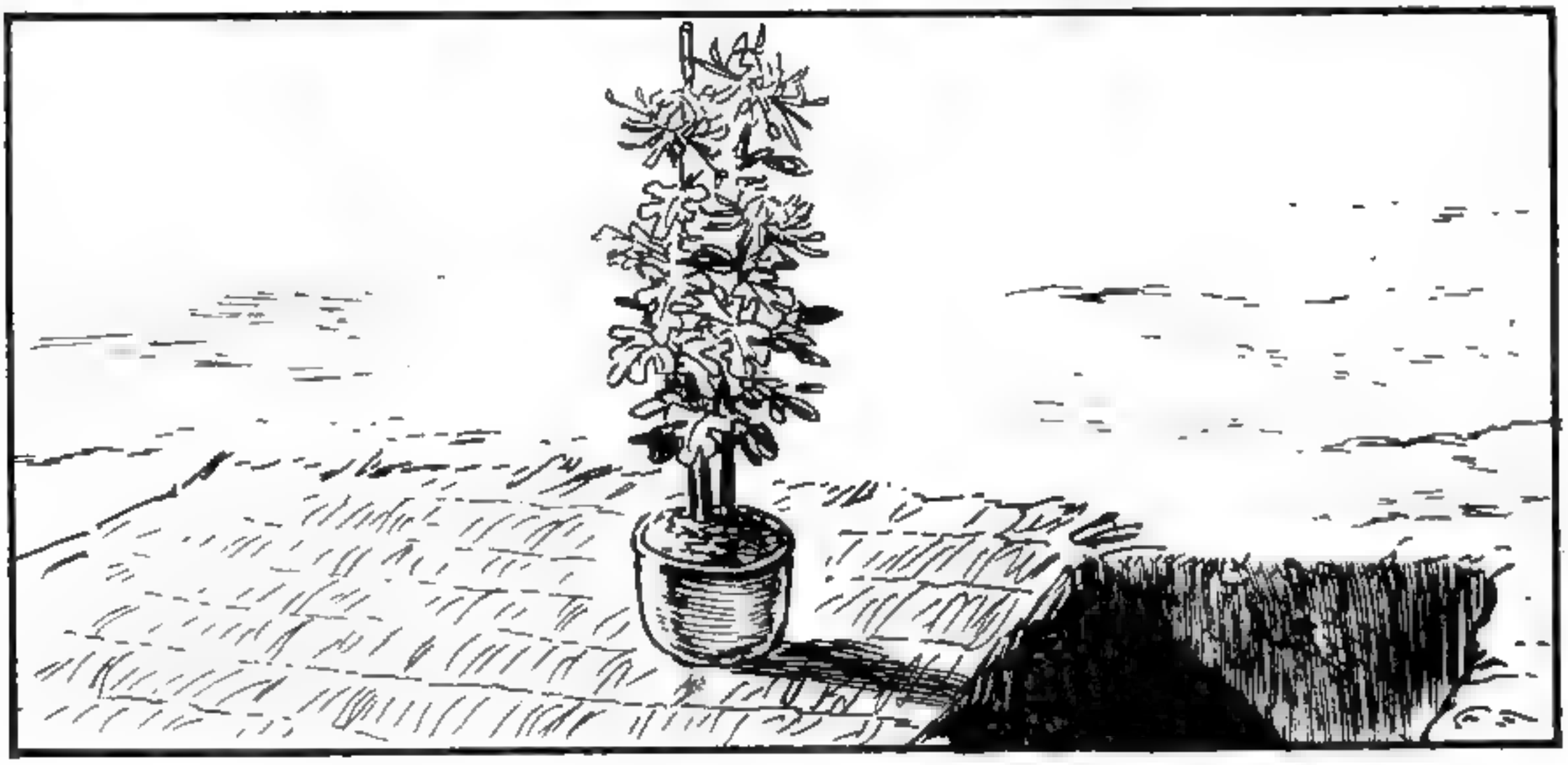
YEAH, IT WAS ALL I COULD DO AFTER BUGGING THE GUARDS TO GO EASY ON ME.

I'D OCCASIONALLY SEE IT ON THE VERANDA BY THE OFFICE, BUT ONLY NOW DO I SEE WHAT A GREAT JOB YOU DID.

THIS CHRYSANTHEMUM CUTTING'S CALLED "A WIFE'S EMBRACE."

NO MERE
BEGINNER
COULD POSSIBLY
MAKE ONE.

COME ON,
LET'S
GO.



SHK
SHK
IF YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS, I'LL LISTEN.
THANK YOU.

I'M CHRYSANTHEMUM SHIGEZŌ.

BEFORE YOU CUT OFF *MY* HEAD, COULD YOU PLEASE CUT OFF *ITS* HEAD?

AFTER YOU CUT OFF *ITS* HEAD, I'D LIKE YOU TO CUT OFF *MY* HEAD.

COULD YOU DO THAT FOR ME?

FINE.

THANK YOU.

YAMADA-*SAMA*, DO YOU LIKE CHRYSANTHEMUMS?

I'M NOT TOO MOVED BY NATURE...

...BUT I THINK I'M *ENVIOUS* OF THOSE WHO GROW SUCH BEAUTIFUL THINGS FOR A LIVING.

YAMADA-*SAMA*, COULD YOU GROW A CHRYSANTHEMUM IN THIS BOWL FOR ME?

A *SECOND-GENERATION* CHRYSANTHEMUM CUTTING?

SINCE I WAS ABLE TO RAISE THE FIRST ONE LIKE THIS, THE SECOND CAN'T BE TOO HARD.

I HAVE A DISCIPLE NAMED *TAKAKO*. SHE CULTIVATES *ATSUMONO*.

SHE TALKED TO ME AND SHE WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE YOU TO GROW IT.

I'M BEGGING YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO CUT OFF BOTH *MY* HEAD AND *ITS* HEAD.

A YEAR FROM NOW, ON THE *VERY DAY* IT BLOOMS, COULD YOU PLEASE CUT OFF ITS HEAD AGAIN?

IF YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO TELL ME ABOUT CHRYSANTHEMUMS, IT WOULD BE BEST IF YOU WENT RIGHT AHEAD AND SAID IT.

NO, NOT EVEN A *MILLION* WORDS COULD MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND.

IF YOU *FEEL* SOMETHING WHEN YOU CUT OFF THE HEAD OF THAT SECOND-GENERATION CHRYSANTHEMUM, THAT WILL BE GOOD ENOUGH.

I AM SO SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU. I REALIZE THAT MY WISHES MAY BE LAUGHABLE, BUT...

...I HAD BEEN ASKING ABOUT YOU, AND YOU HAD ALWAYS SAID THAT AN EXECUTIONER MUST UNDERSTAND THE EXECUTED.

I BESEECH YOU, SIR.

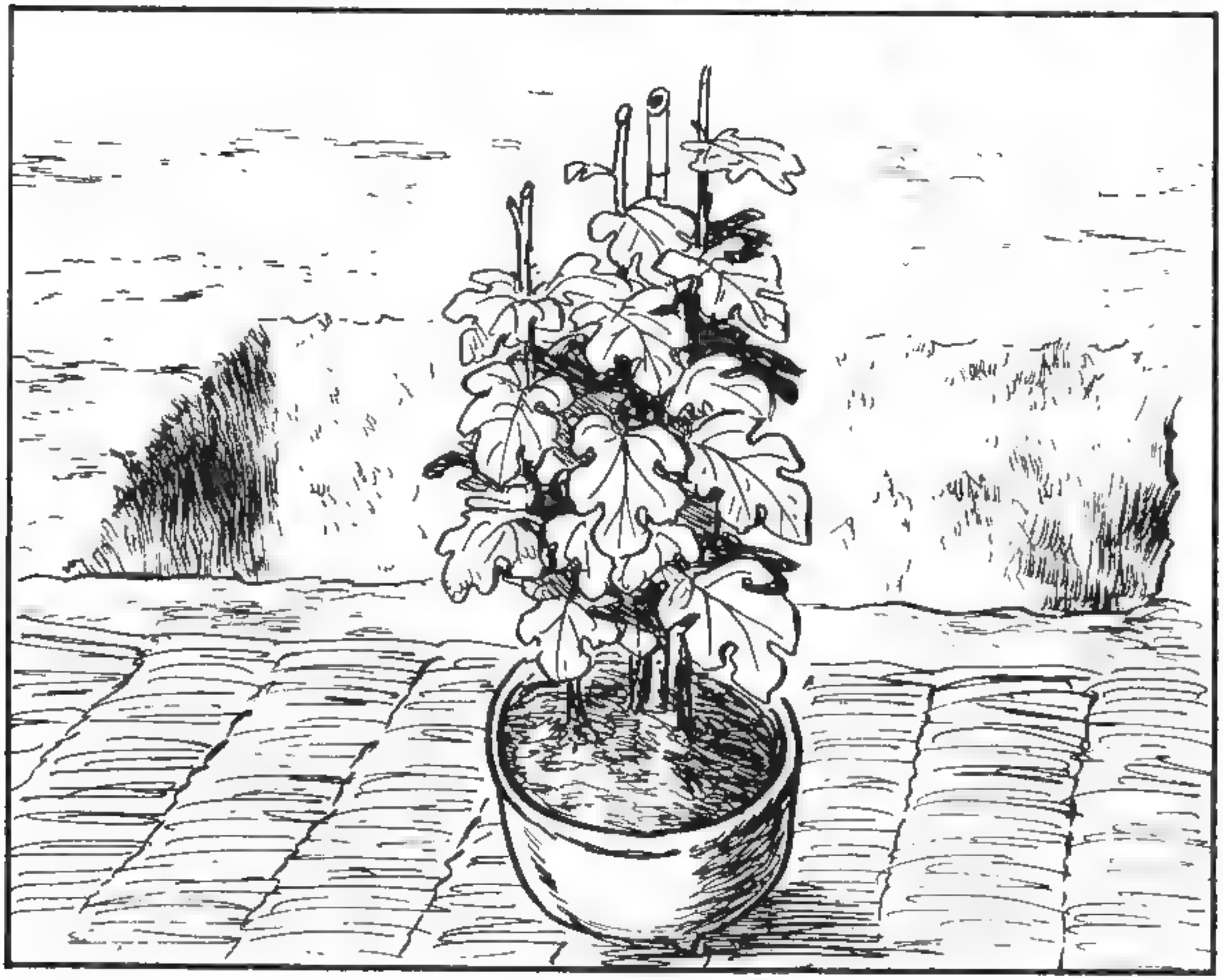
I HAVE *NEVER* GROWN ANY CHRYSANTHEMUMS BEFORE, BUT I WILL *TRY* TO DO SO IF YOU WISH..

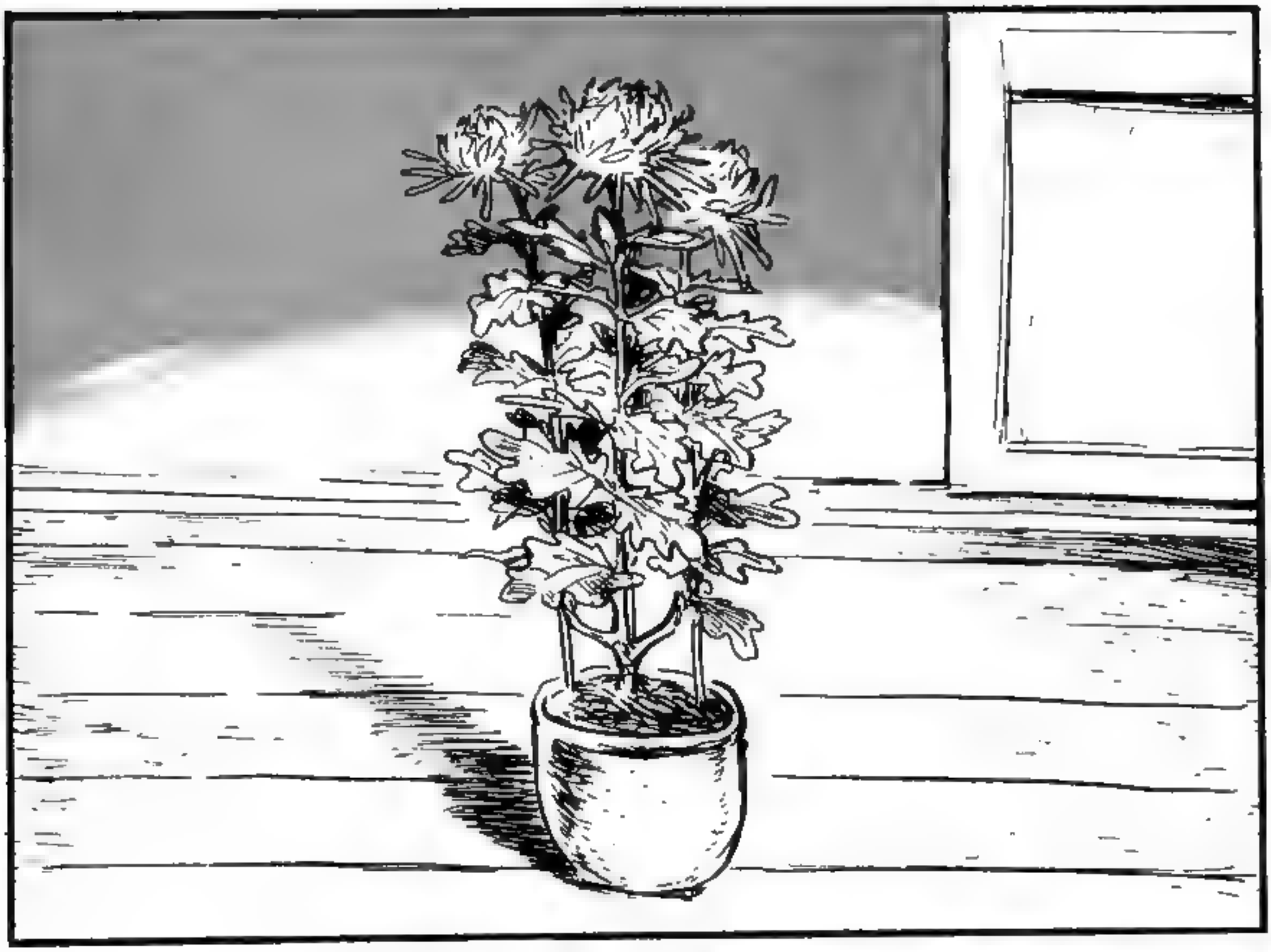
SINCE THAT'S HOW I'LL BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND HOW YOU'LL FEEL AT THE MOMENT OF YOUR *DEATH.*

TH-THANK YOU.

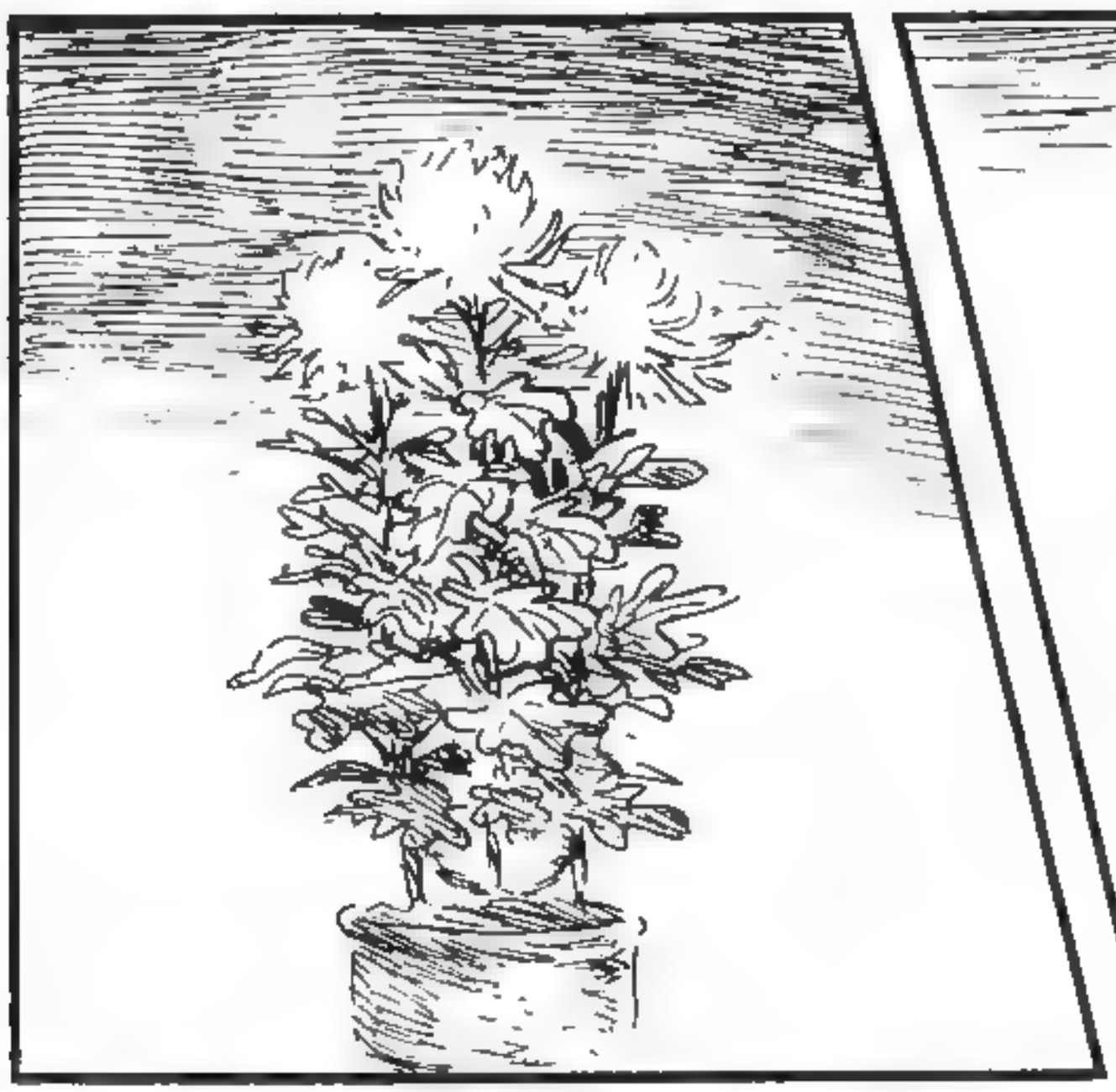
PSHH

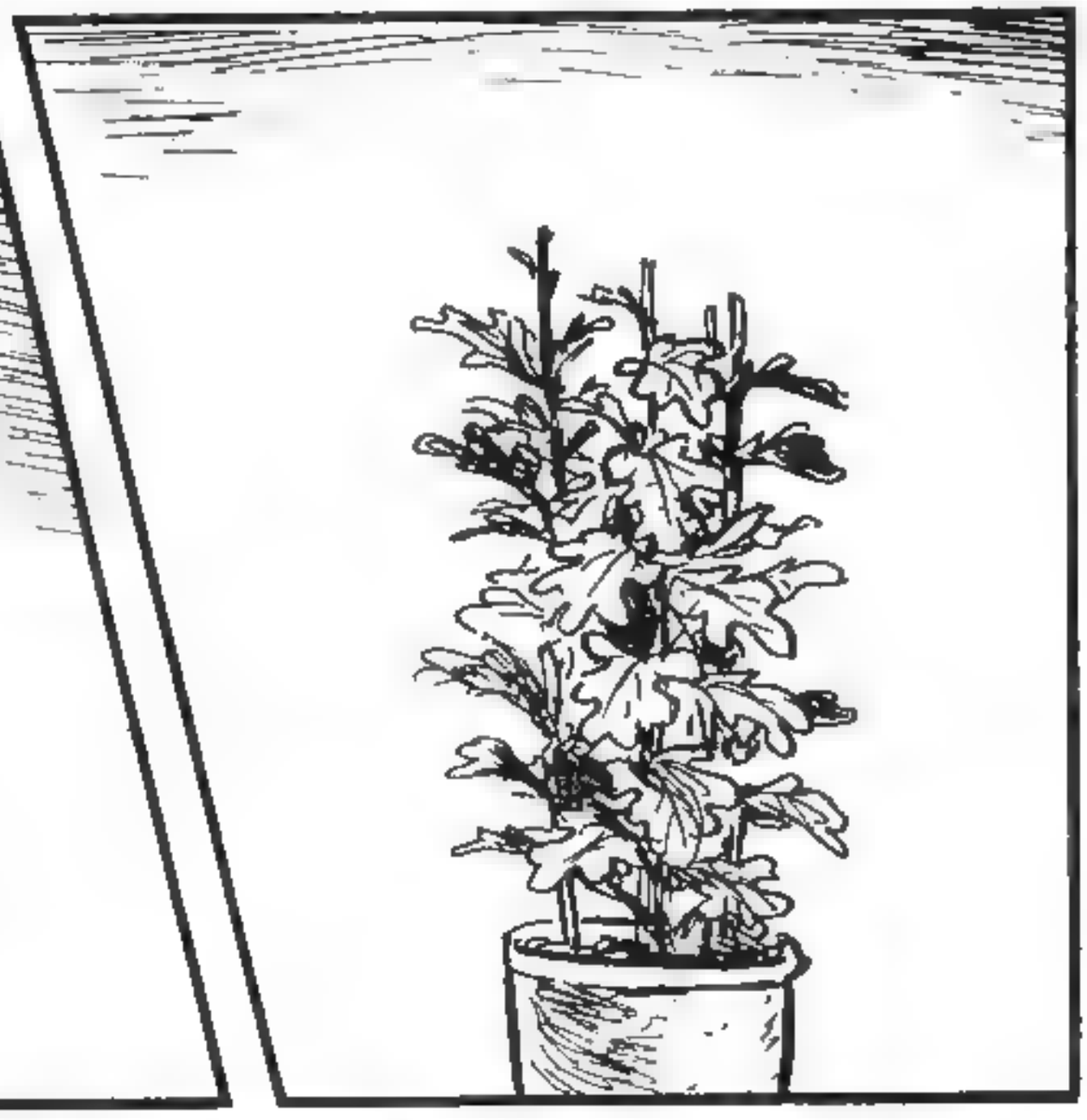
BZHHH!



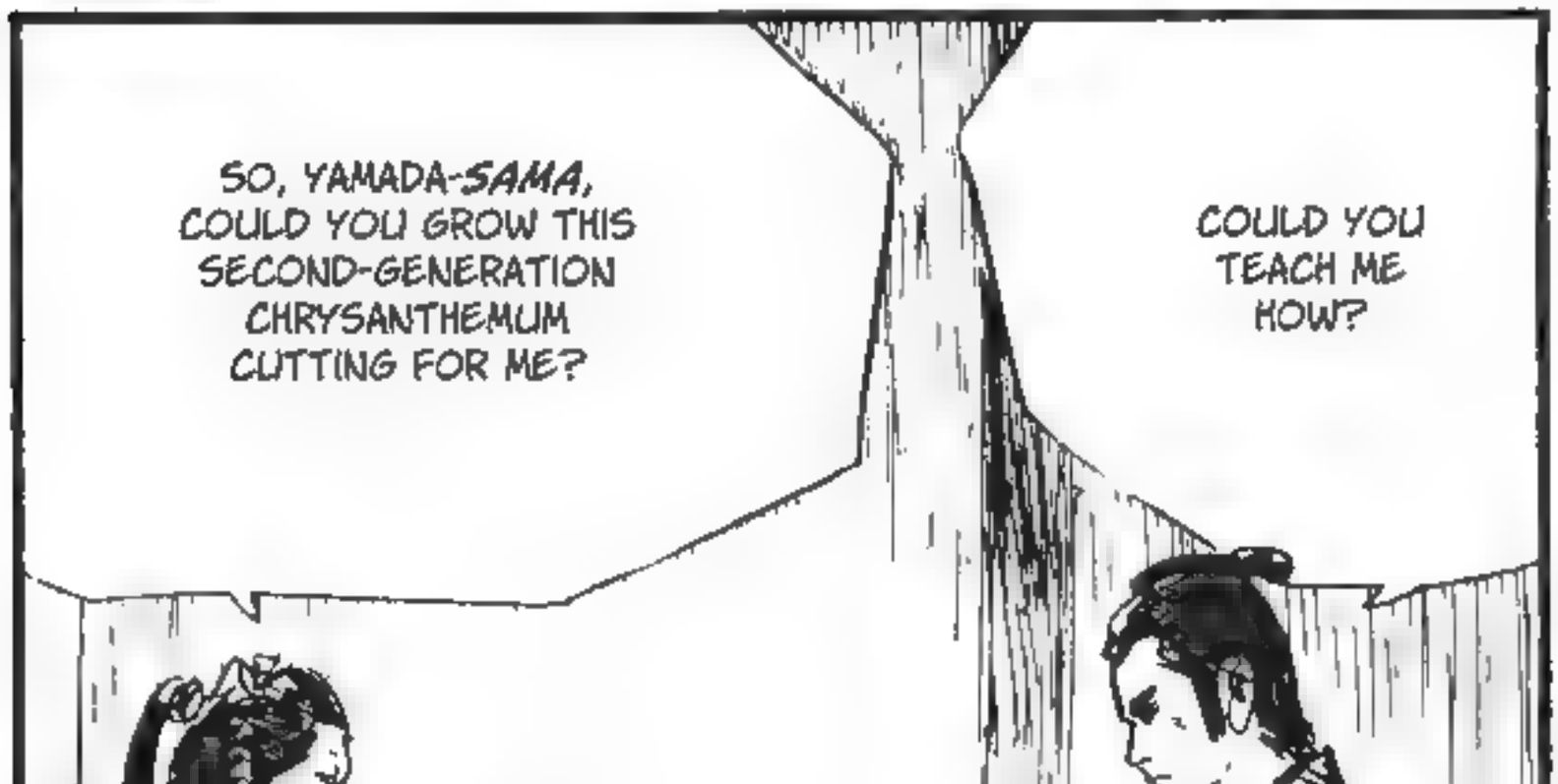


IT'S BEEN...
ONE YEAR...



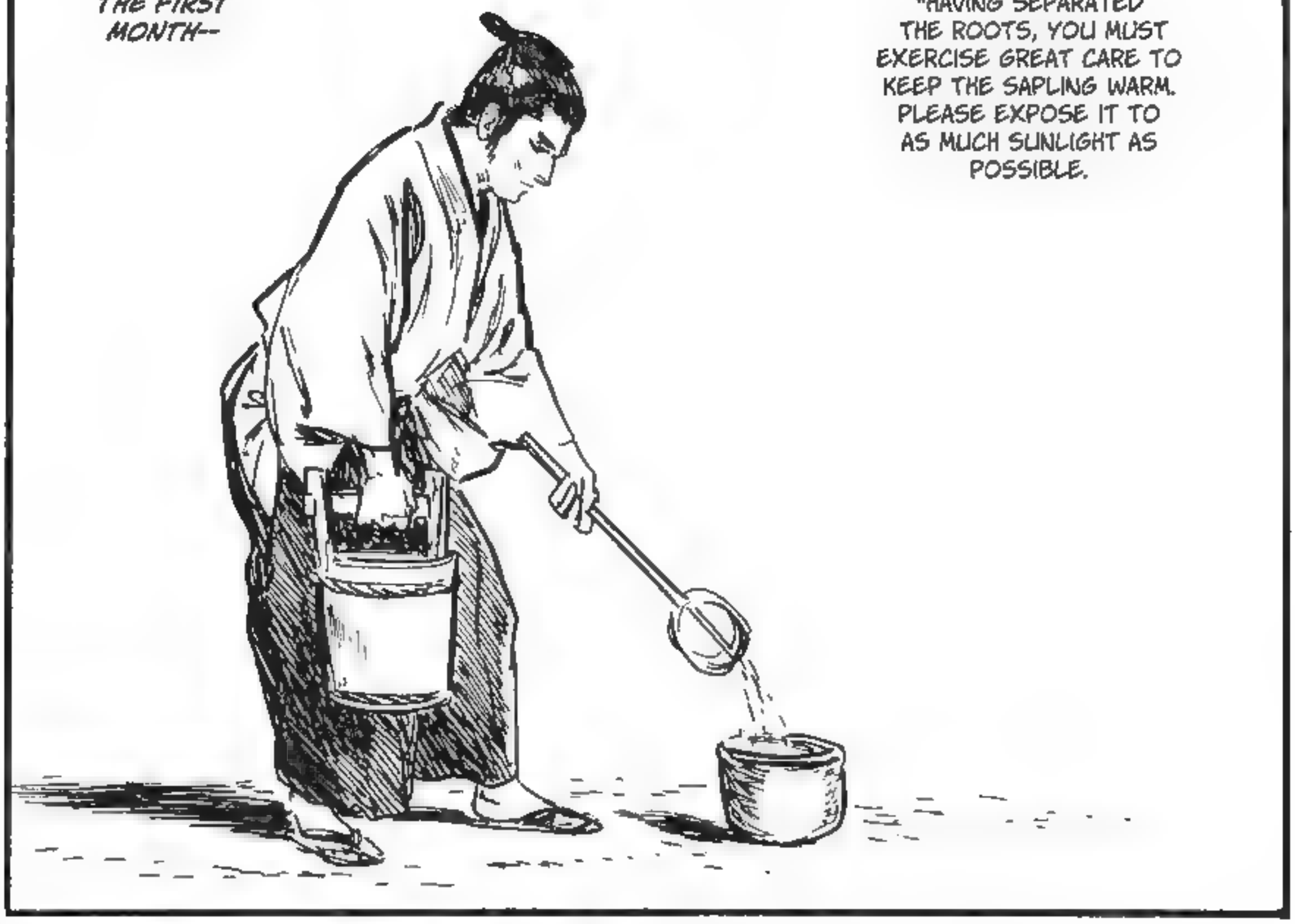


SO THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED...


SO, YAMADA-SAMA, COULD YOU GROW THIS SECOND-GENERATION CHRYSANTHEMUM CUTTING FOR ME?
COULD YOU TEACH ME HOW?

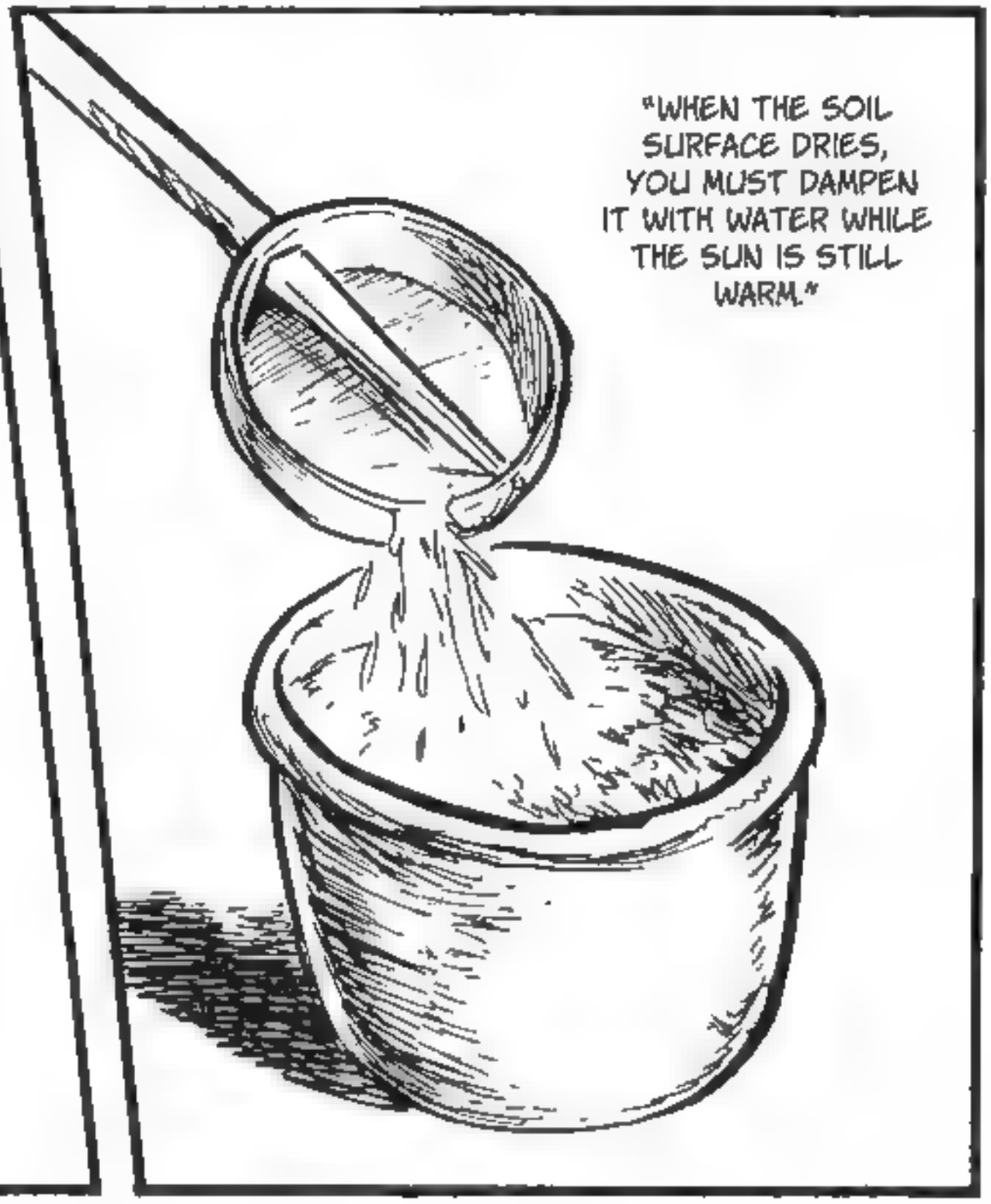
I WILL.

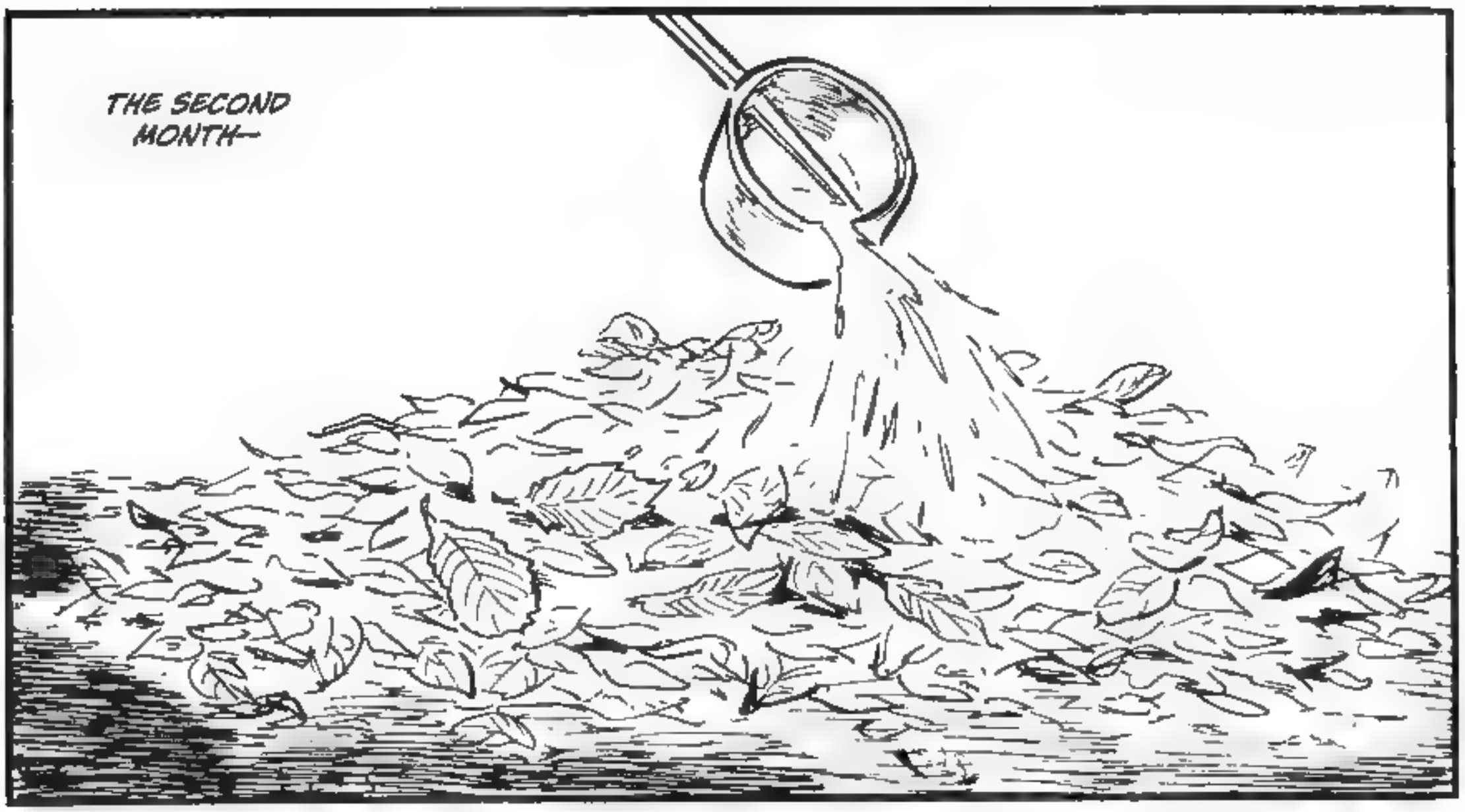
THE FIRST MONTH--



"HAVING SEPARATED THE ROOTS, YOU MUST EXERCISE GREAT CARE TO KEEP THE SAPLING WARM. PLEASE EXPOSE IT TO AS MUCH SUNLIGHT AS POSSIBLE.

"WHEN THE SOIL SURFACE DRIES, YOU MUST DAMPEN IT WITH WATER WHILE THE SUN IS STILL WARM."





"OAK, WHITE OAK, *NARA* OAK, BEECH, *KUNUGI* OAK, ZELKOVA, AND CAMELLIA LEAVES ARE THE MOST APPROPRIATE FOR COMPOST."

THE THIRD MONTH--

"WHEN YOU PLUCK OFF THE TIPS OF THE BUDS, PLEASE APPLY A LITTLE FERTILIZER."

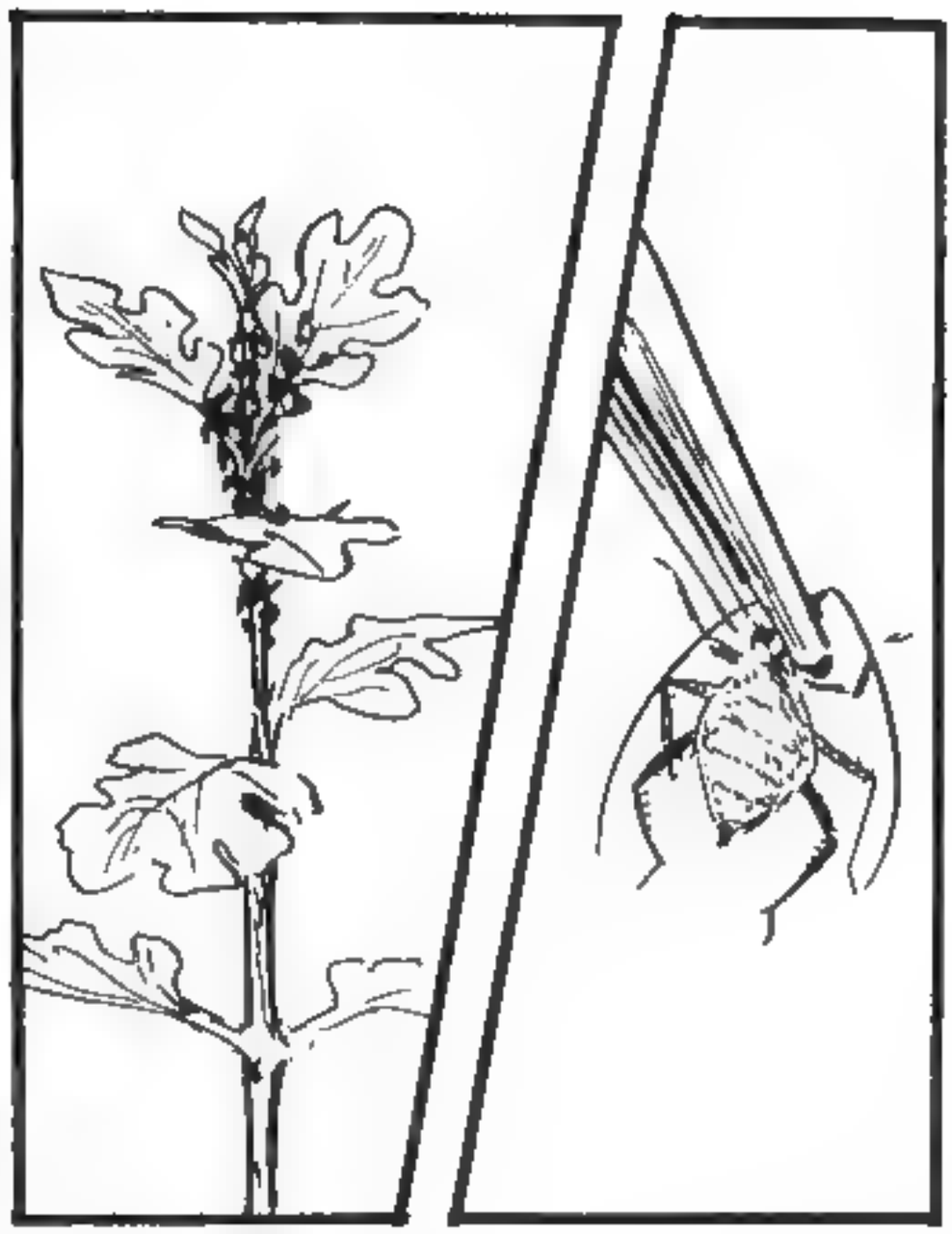
THE FOURTH MONTH--

THE FIFTH MONTH--
"A CLEAR DAY IS BEST FOR CUTTING OFF THE BUDS.

"PLEASE TAKE SPECIAL CARE TO AVOID ALLOWING THE CUT EARS TO ROT."

THE SIXTH MONTH--

"THIS IS BUG SEASON, SO PLEASE WATCH OUT FOR PESTS."



THE SEVENTH MONTH--

"ONCE THE PLANTS HAVE SETTLED, SPRINKLE WATER IN MODERATION FOR FIVE TO SIX DAYS...AND TRY TO SLOWLY INCREASE THE AMOUNT.

"WHEN THE RAINY SEASON ENDS AND SUMMER BEGINS, IT WILL BECOME EXTREMELY HOT, SO PLEASE SHIELD THE PLANTS FROM THE SUN.

"WILLOW BUDS WILL APPEAR HALFWAY THROUGH.

"CUT THEM OFF, LEAVING ONLY THE FULL BUDS, AND IT WOULD BE NICE IF YOU GAVE THEM SOME FERTILIZER.

THE EIGHTH MONTH--

"THEY'LL BE GROWING A LOT AT THIS POINT, SO GIVE THEM MORE FERTILIZER IN THE FIRST THIRD OF THE MONTH.

"THEN IN THE SECOND THIRD, STOP ADDING FERTILIZER.

"PLEASE GIVE THEM A FULL SPRINKLING OF WATER EACH MORNING.

"IT WOULD BE GOOD TO ADD SOME SOIL TOWARD THE END OF THE MONTH."

THE NINTH MONTH—

"THE AMOUNT OF CARE THAT YOU INVEST THIS MONTH WILL DETERMINE THE QUALITY OF YOUR CHRYSANTHEMUMS. PLEASE STOP ADDING SOIL AND SHIELDING THE PLANTS FROM THE SUN. INSTEAD, *EXPOSE* THEM TO THE SUN.

"ONCE YOU'RE PAST THE SECOND THIRD OF THE MONTH, I RECOMMEND THAT YOU ADD FERTILIZER TWICE.

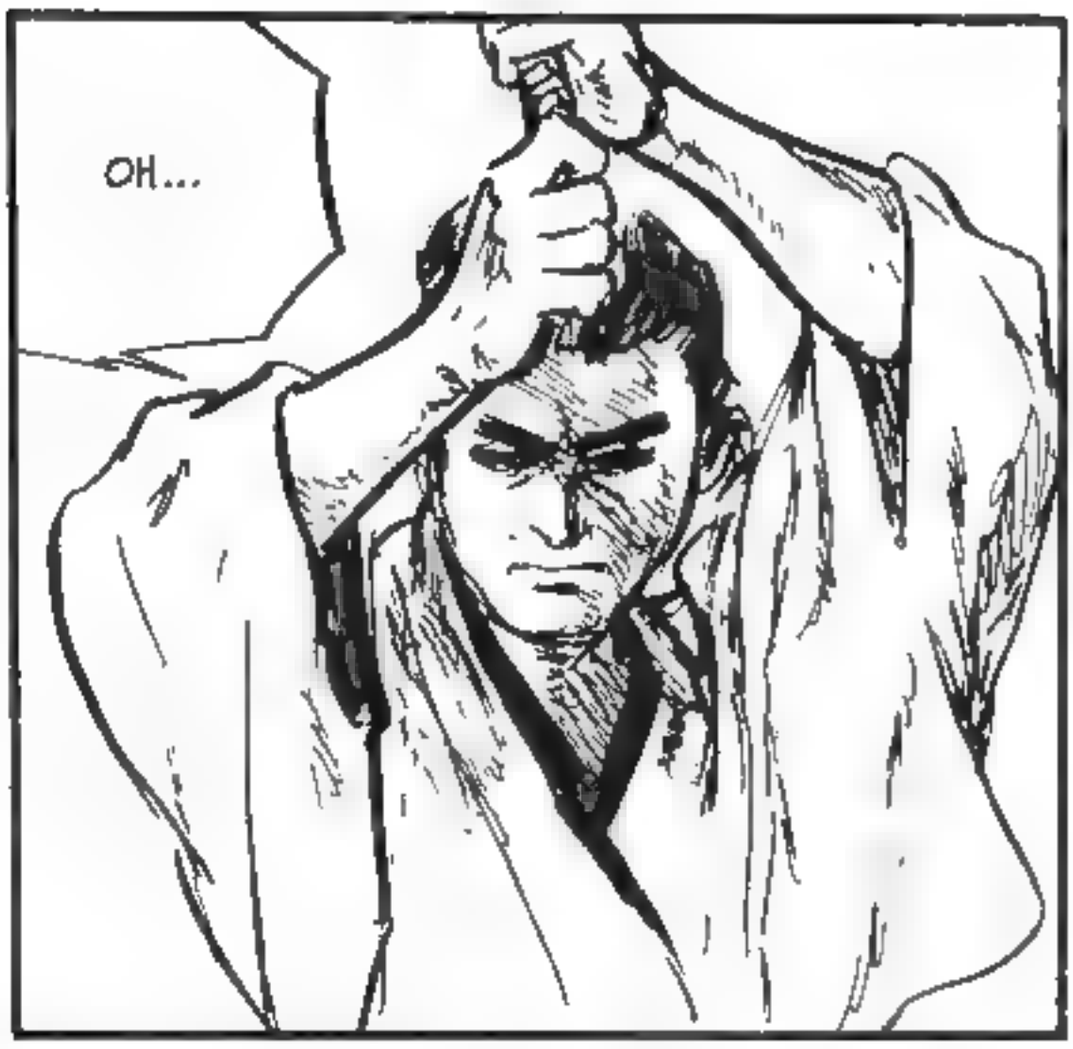
"AFTER THE BUDS APPEAR, PLEASE SPRINKLE THEM THOROUGHLY.

"PLEASE LEAVE THE MAIN BUD AND SIDE BUDS INTACT AND CUT OFF THE REST..."

THE TENTH MONTH—

THE ELEVENTH MONTH—

EXCELLENT.


OH...

I
CAN'T
CUT IT.

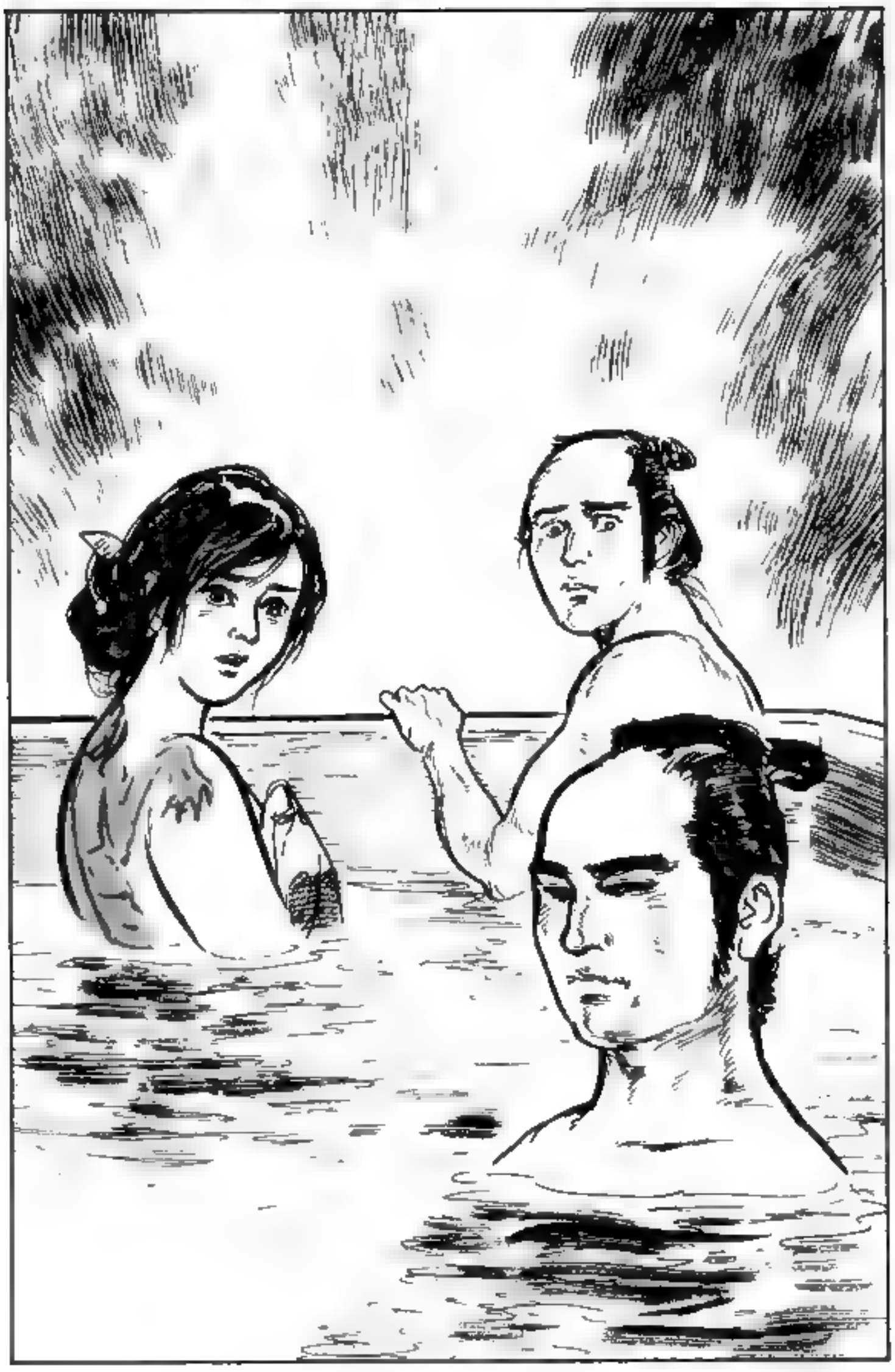
SO *THAT'S* HOW SHIGEZŌ FELT. HE WANTED TO SAY THAT THE LIFE OF A *CHRYSANTHEMUM* AND THE LIFE OF A *MAN* WERE THE SAME...

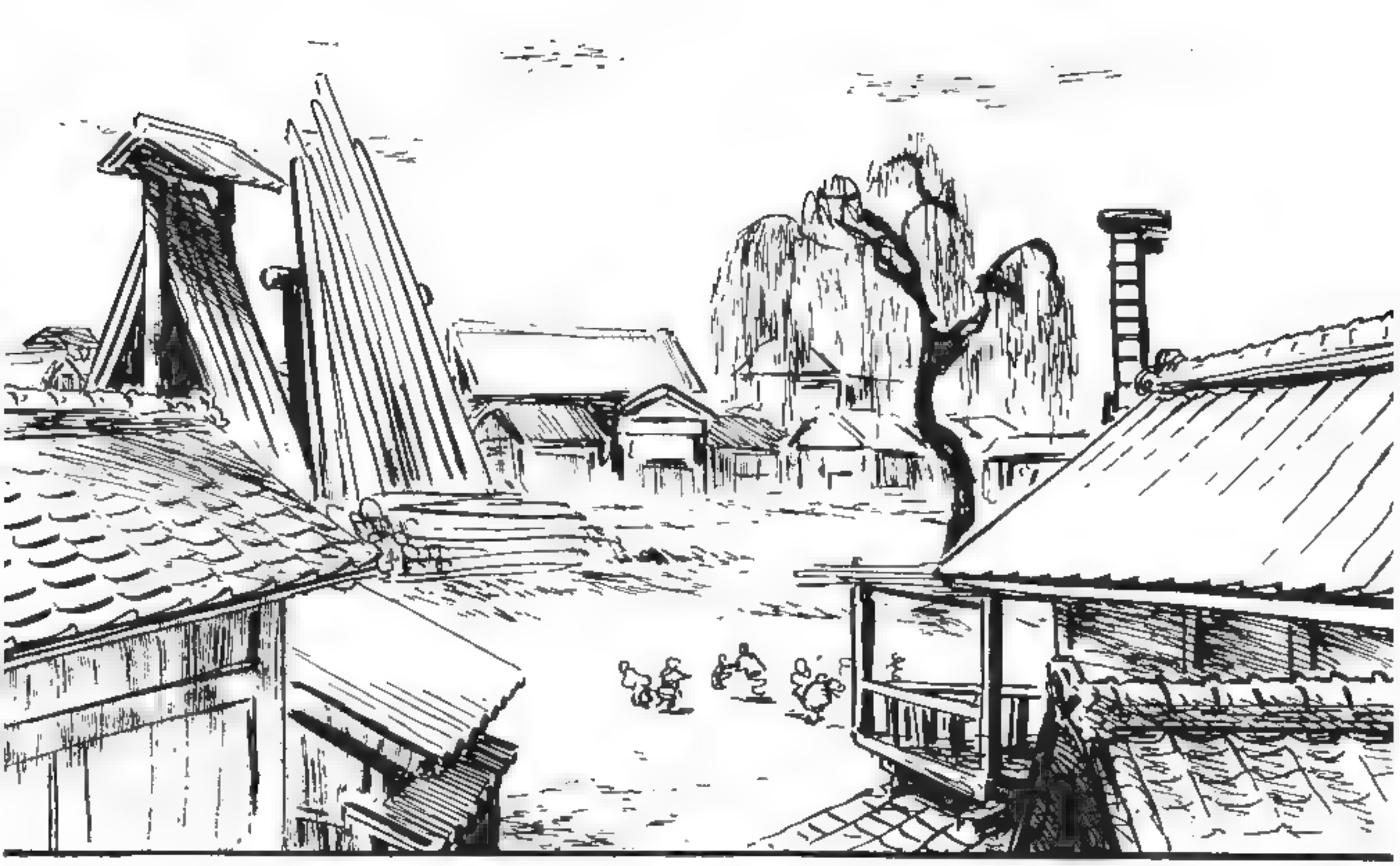
YES. WHEN SOMEONE BROKE OFF THE CHRYSANTHEMUM THAT HE HAD POURED HIS *HEART* AND *SOUL* INTO...

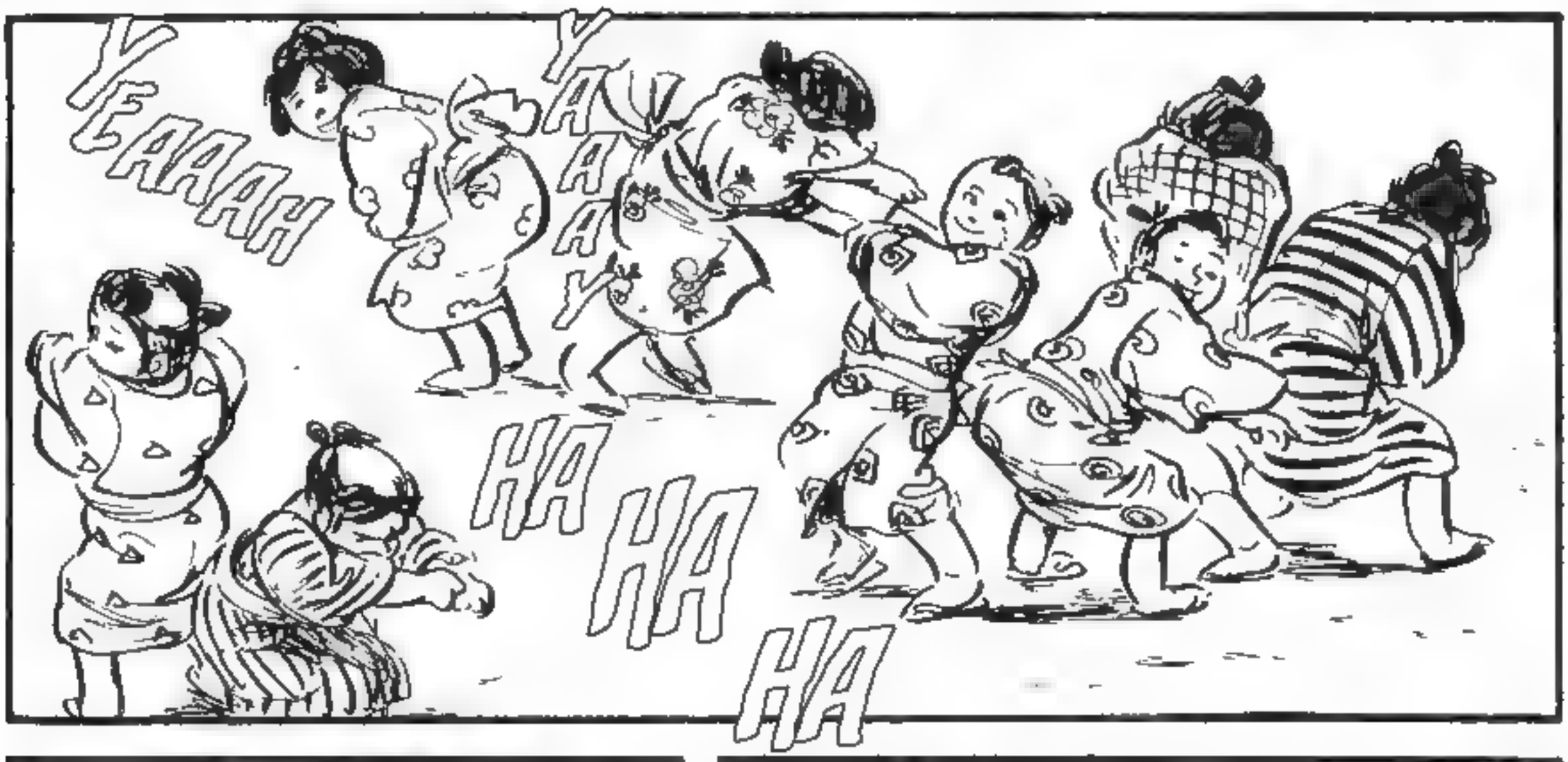
...HE FLEW INTO A RAGE AND *KILLED* HIM.

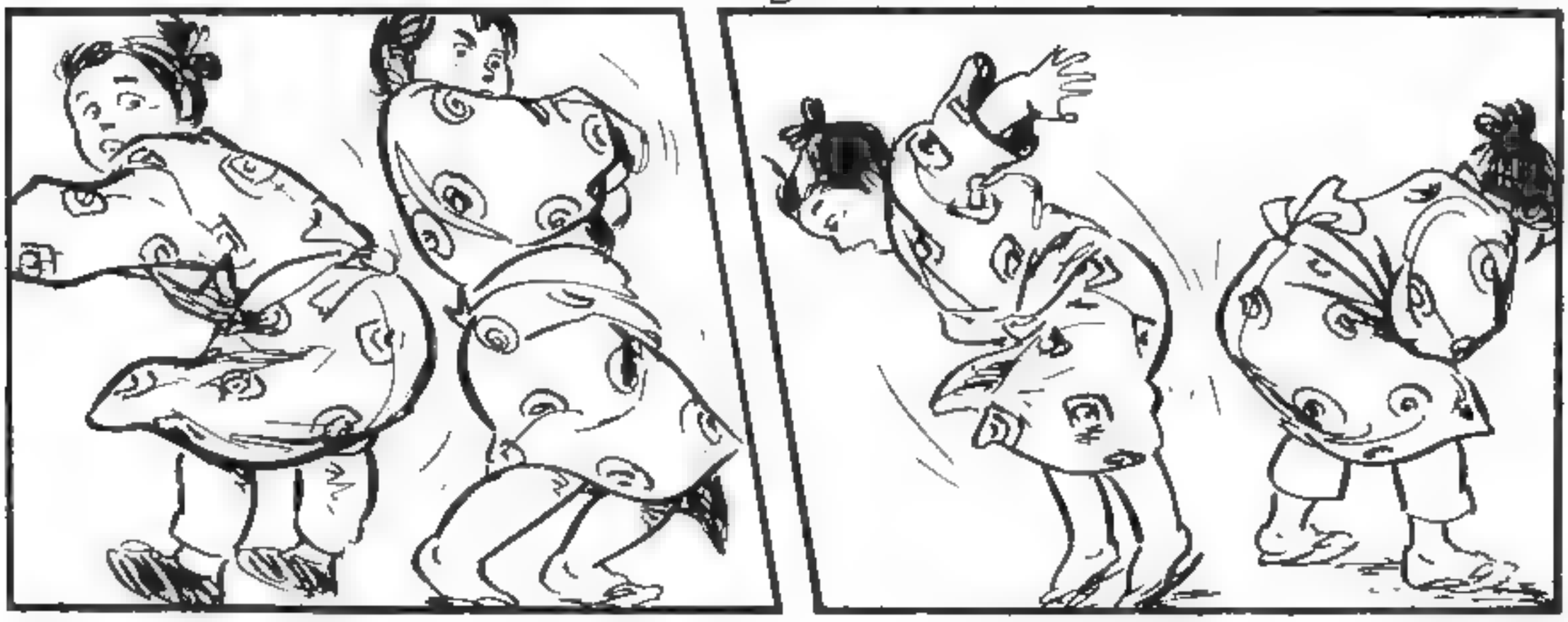
HE WANTED YOU TO UNDERSTAND HOW HE FELT AT THAT MOMENT, YAMADA-*SAMA*. I HAVE NO DOUBT ABOUT THAT.

the fifty-second Umbrella for Two






YEAAAH
YA
AA
HA
HA
HA



WHUMP

BUMP

OH!

HA HA HA HA HA

S-SIR...

THIS ISN'T THE TIME FOR THAT, SIR.
WE JUST FOUND OUT WHERE *NENBUTSU* NISA IS HIDING.

WHAT?
LOOKS LIKE WE'VE GOT A CLUE THANKS TO HIS MISTRESS.

THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW WHETHER HE'LL ACTUALLY SHOW UP THERE OR NOT. BUT MURAKAMI ORDERED US TO WATCH ALL THE NEARBY ROUTES...

SIR, YOU, YOUR WIFE, AND I WILL BE ON *THIS* ROUTE.

AROUND THE BOTTOM OF DARKNESS HILL, HUH?

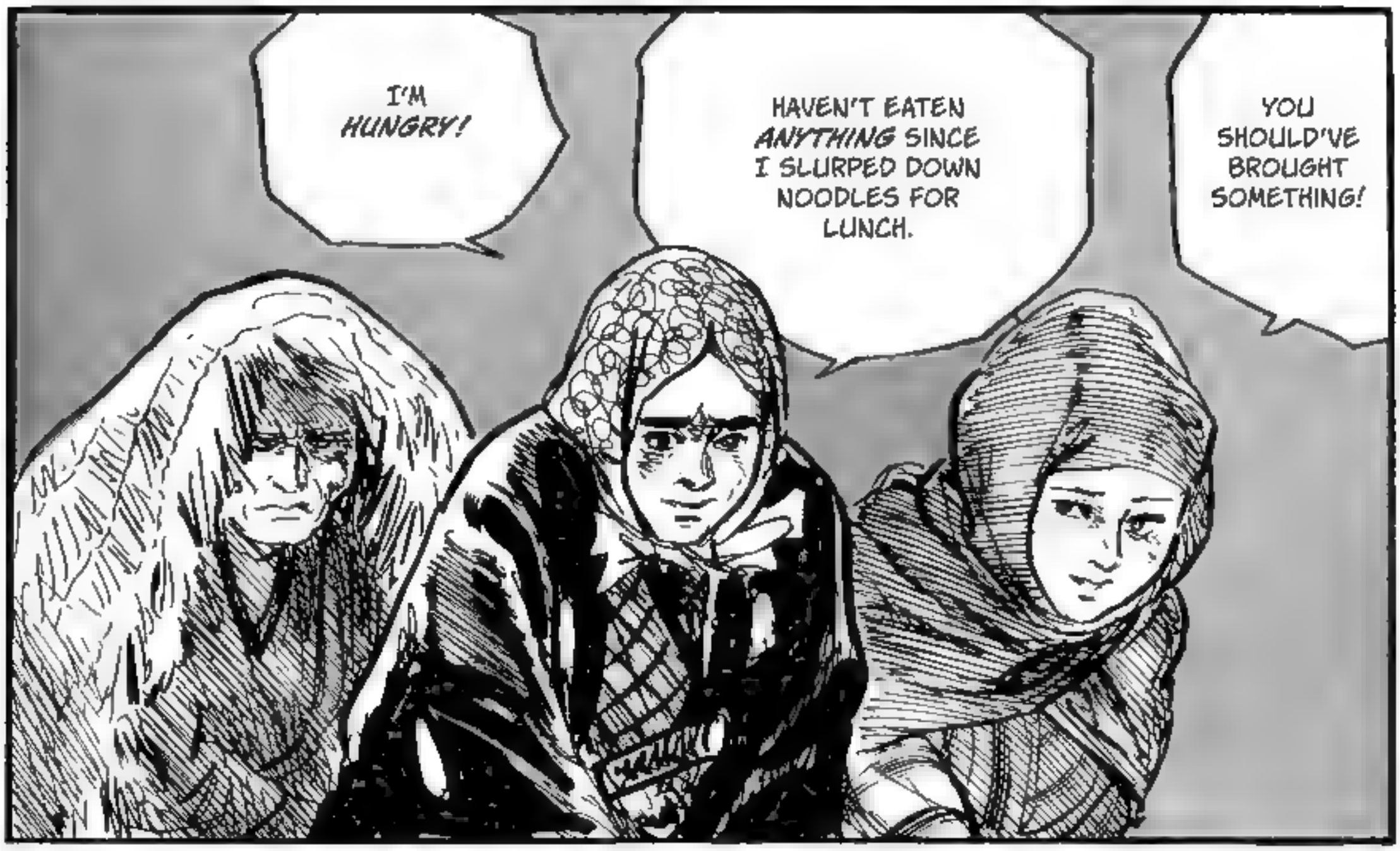
YEAH. IF THE GUY BREAKS FREE FROM MURAKAMI'S CORDON AND GOES DOWN THE HILL, IT'S HIS EASIEST ROUTE OF ESCAPE.

OKAY, LET MURAKAMI KNOW THAT I'LL BE TAKING THE LEAD.

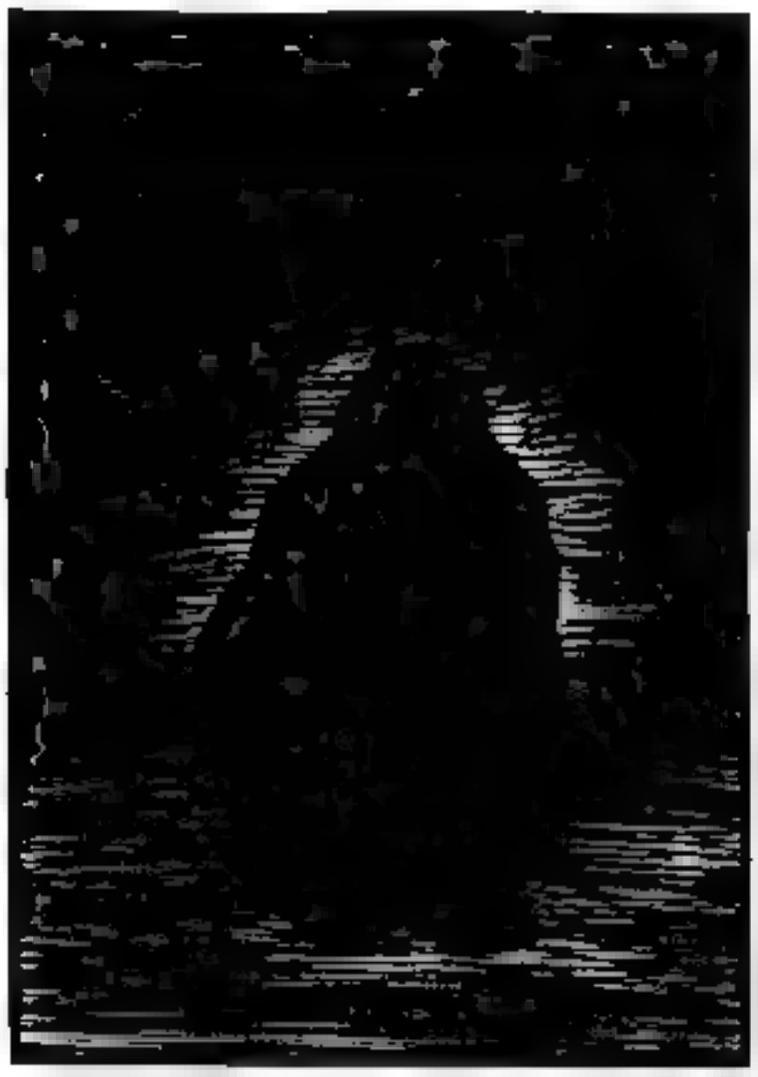
GOT IT.

I'M *FREEZING.* YOU OKAY?

I'M *FINE.*


I'M *HUNGRY!*
HAVEN'T EATEN *ANYTHING* SINCE I SLURPED DOWN NOODLES FOR LUNCH.
YOU SHOULD'VE BROUGHT SOMETHING!

I'M GOING ON MY OWN.
YOU SHOULDN'T, BUT OKAY...



THEY DON'T CALL HIM *SMOKY* FOR NOTHING. I CAN'T HEAR HIM. I CAN'T EVEN *SENSE* HIM.

BRRR...

I WANNA *RELIEVE* MYSELF.

ME TOO...

JUST *DO* IT. YOU FIRST.

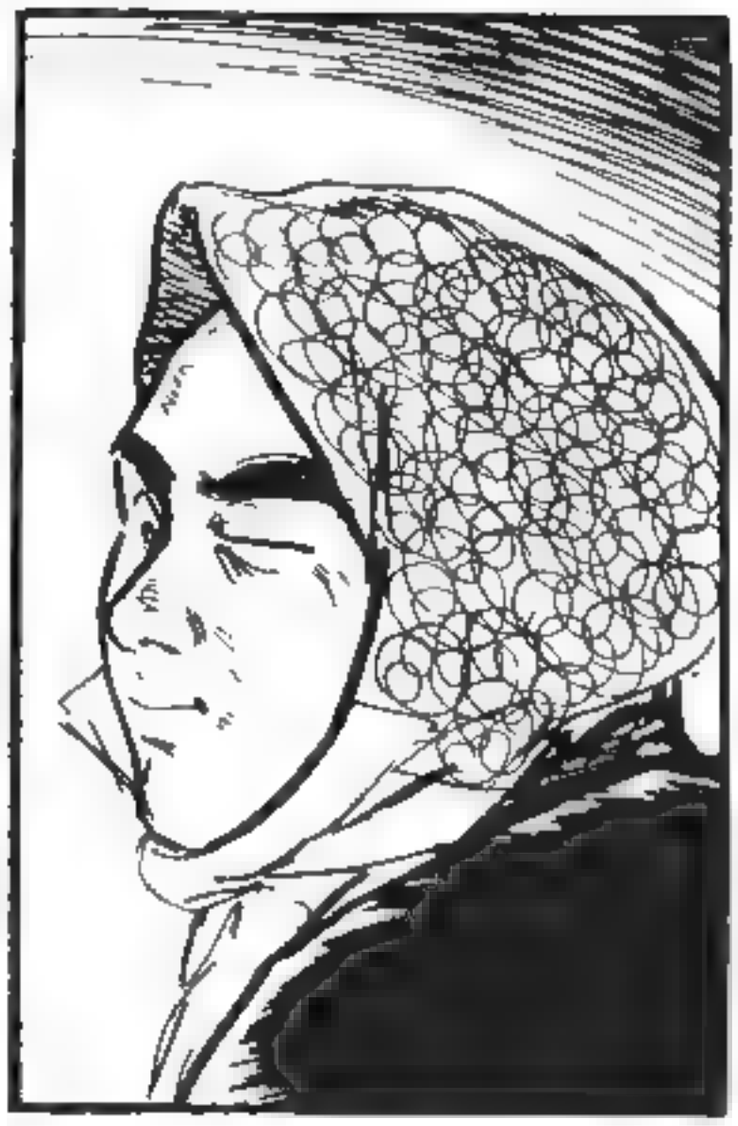
BUT...

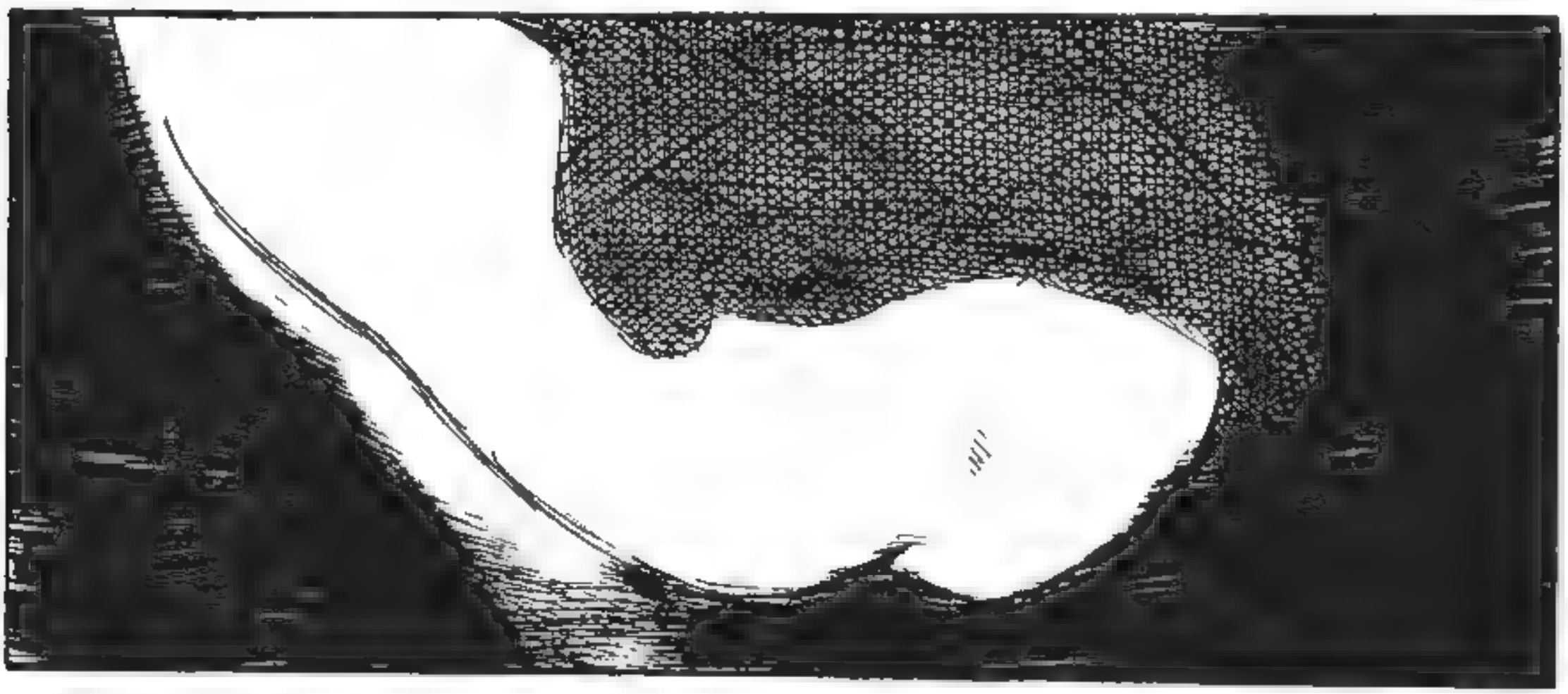
IT'LL BE TOO OBVIOUS IF WE *BOTH* DO IT. IT'S SO COLD THAT IT'D *STEAM*. WE CAN'T MESS UP *NOW*. *I'M* THE *ONLY* ONE HERE. THERE'S NO SHAME.

HERE.

NO, I'LL WAIT.

DON'T
LOOK.





HOLD IT
FOR ME.
?!

YOU *DUMMY* MEN CAN'T DO IT SQUATTING. IT'S 'CAUSE THE TIP OF THEIR THING'LL *DROOP* DOWN.

STUPID. WHY DON'T YOU JUST *HOLD* IT UP?

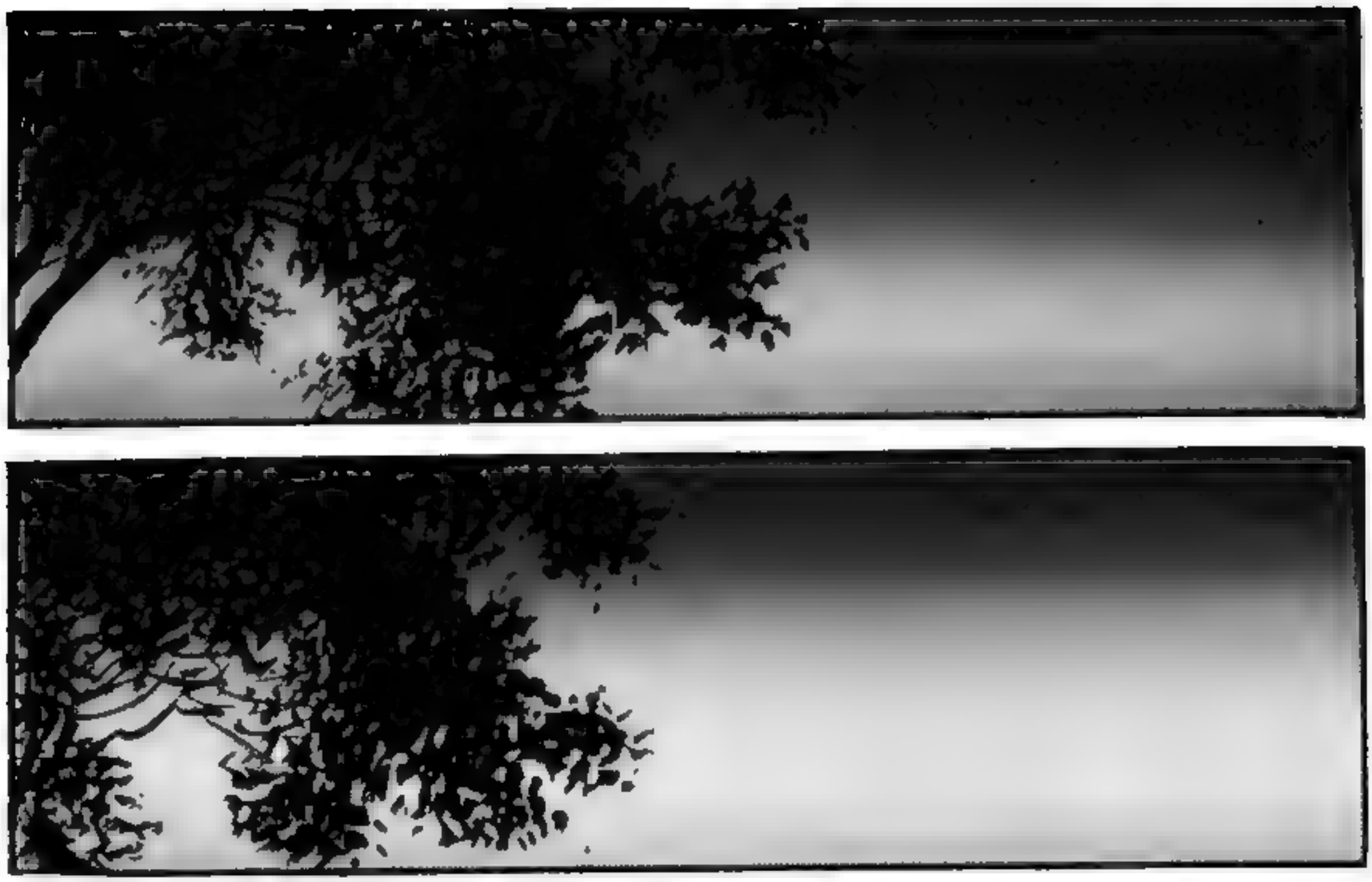
'CAUSE I'VE GOT STUFF IN MY HANDS-- MY *JITTE* AND MY HOOK-ROPE.

BUT YOU'RE NOT HOLDING ANYTHING!

BUT I'VE *GOTTA* HOLD 'EM IN CASE OF EMERGENCY. DON'T YOU THINK SO?!

THAT'S STUPID.

HURRY UP.



THIS WAY I GET WARM AND YOU GET WARM.
EVEN THOUGH I DON'T LIKE IT WHEN YOU MOVE 'EM.

FEEL IT?

YOU DON'T KNOW? DUMMY.

IT'S GETTING *LATE*. THE SUN SUDDENLY JUST ROSE.

BRRR.

IT'S SO COLD I'M GONNA *FREEZE*. MY ARMS AND LEGS ARE GONNA GET *STIFF*. SHINKO, CAN'TCHA MOVE JUST A *LITTLE*?

NISA'S NOT GONNA COME *NOW*. HE PROBABLY HASN'T SHOWN UP AT HIS HIDEOUT EITHER, 'CAUSE IT'S *DAYBREAK*.

LET'S PLAY BUTT *SUMO*.

WHA--?

IT'LL BE *OKAY*. AFTER IT GETS LIGHT, THERE'LL BE *THIEVES* RUNNING AROUND.

I'LL TEACH YOU HOW TO BUTT *SUMO.*

COME ON.

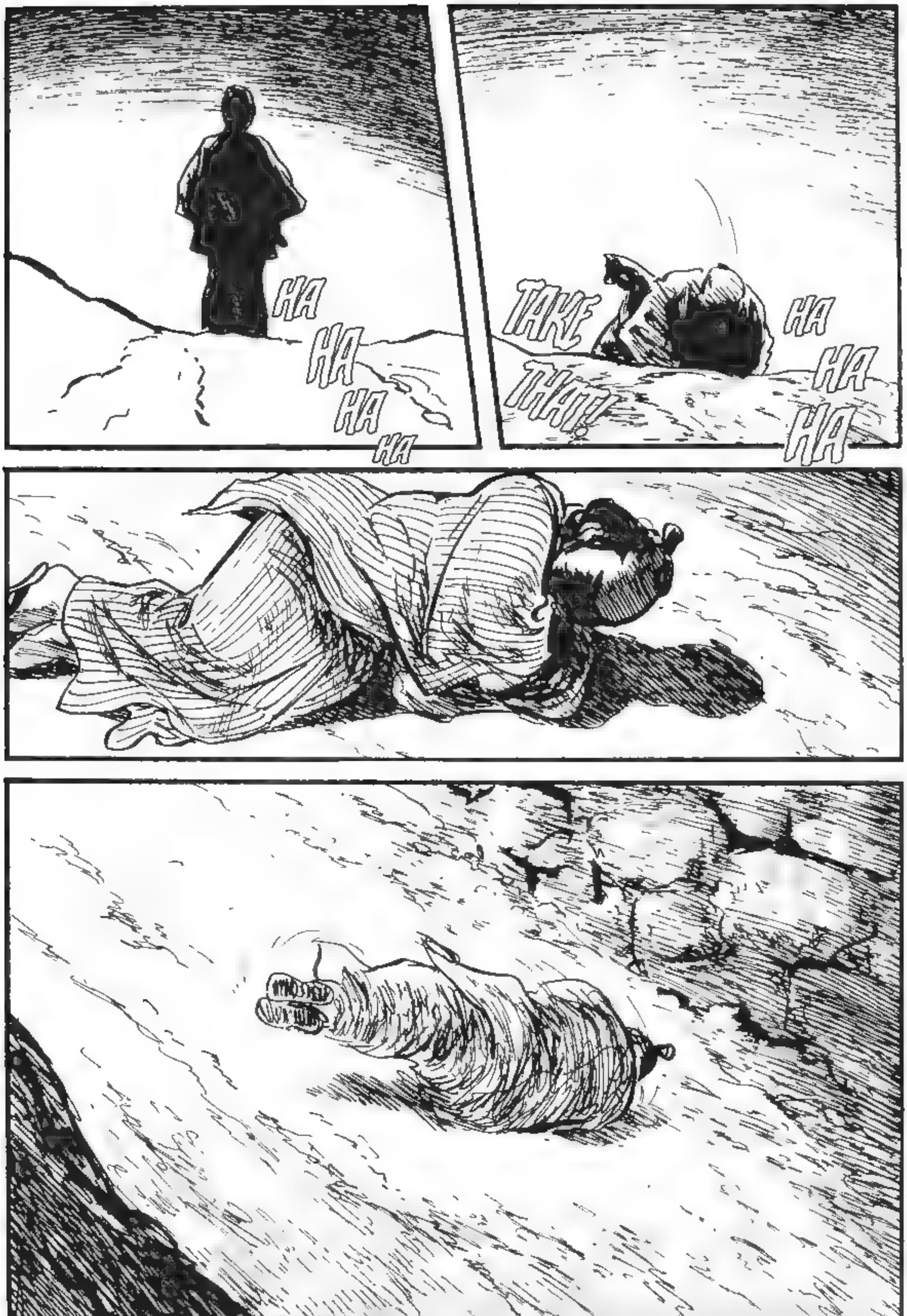
HERE GOES!

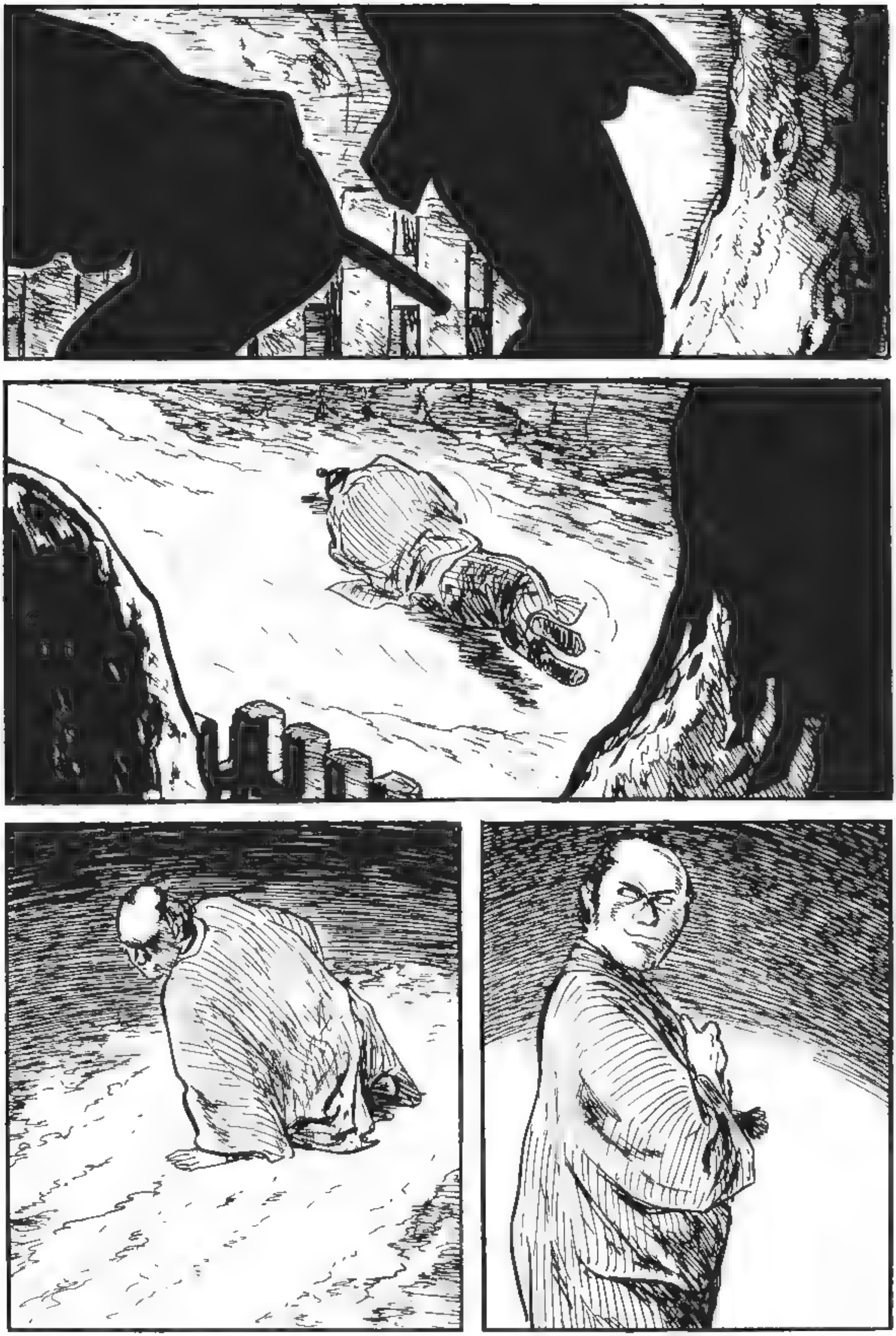
HA, HA.

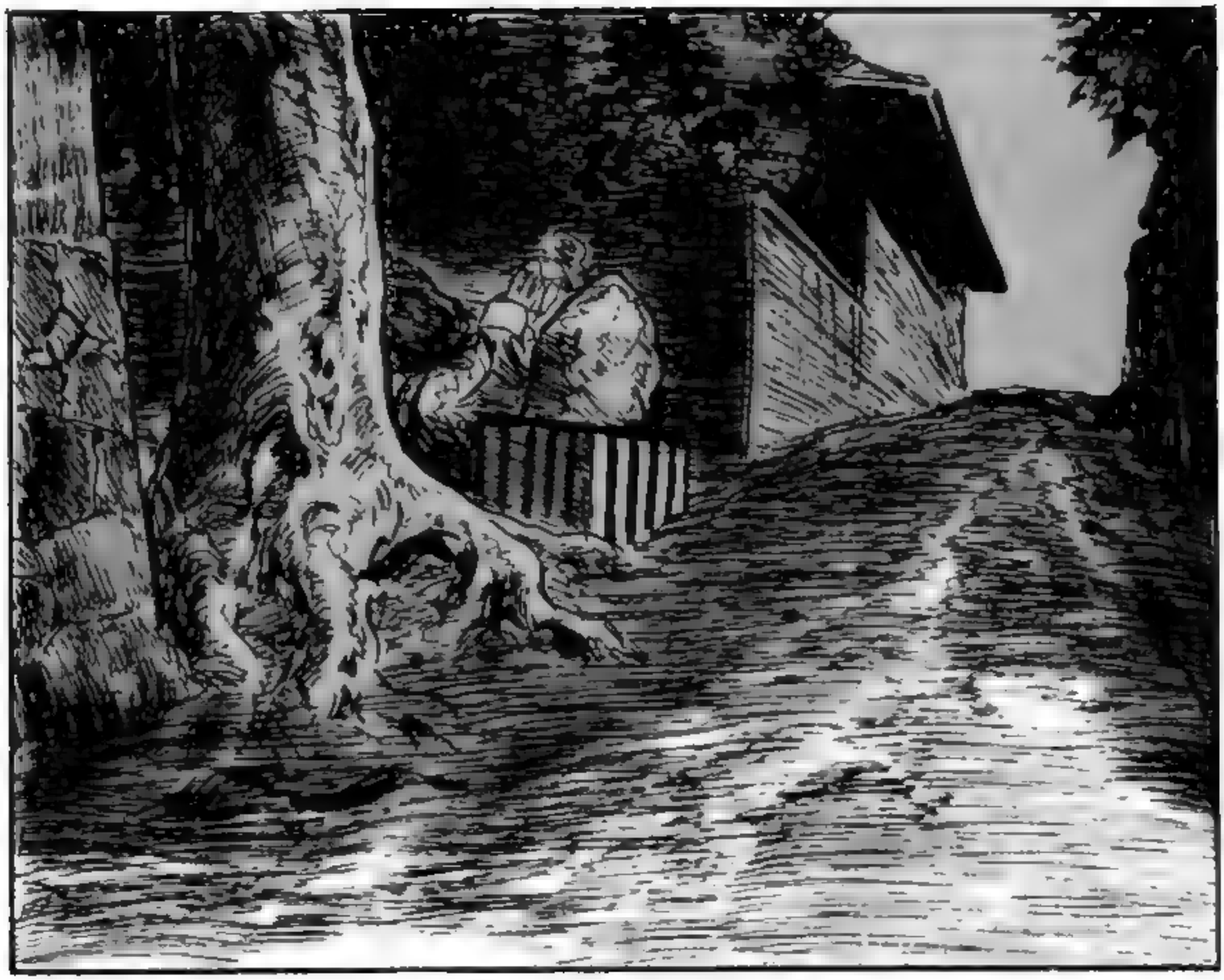
HEH, HEH.

YEAH!

BUMP


HA
HA
HA
HA
TAKE
THAT!!
HA
HA
HA





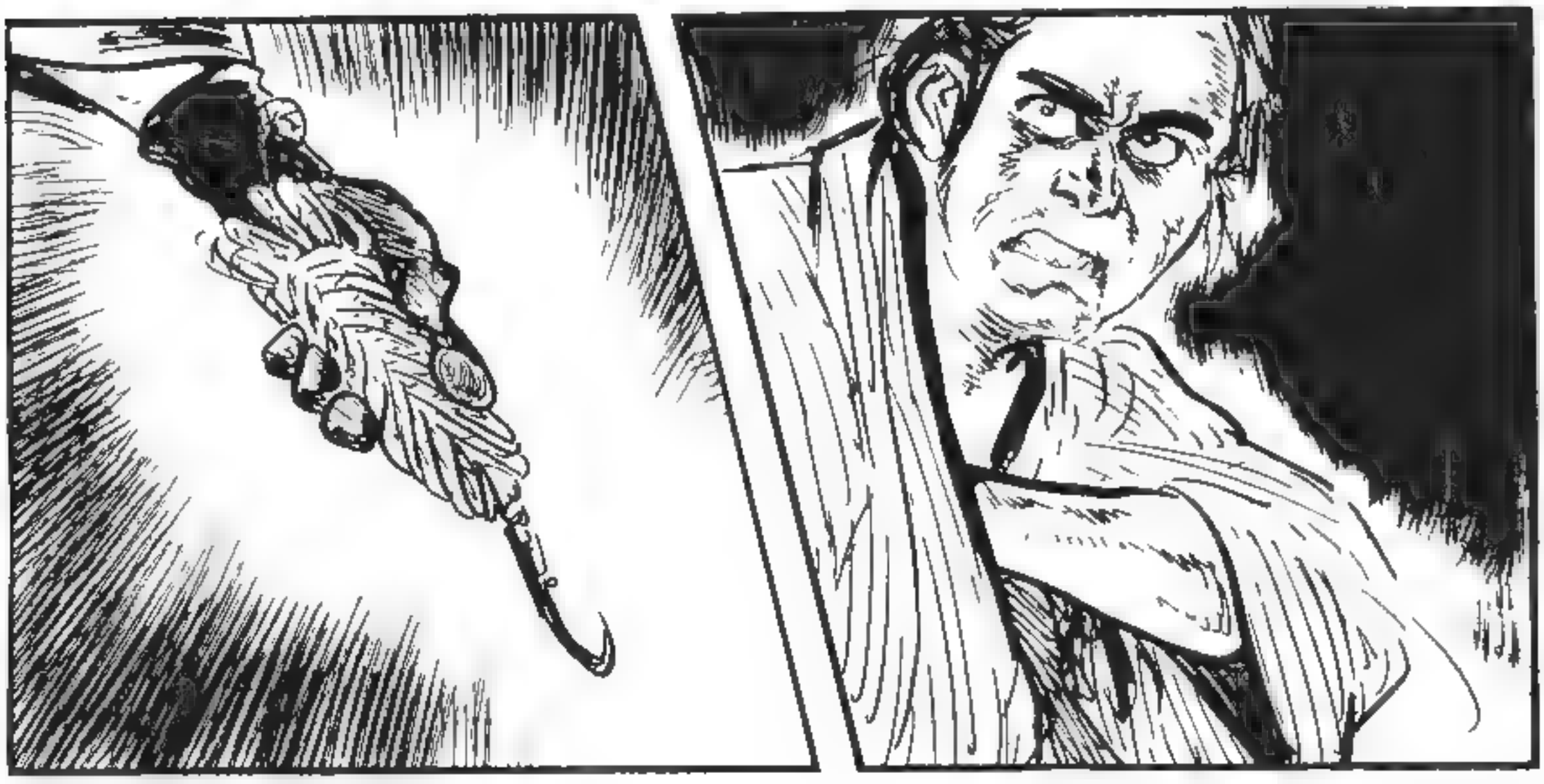
NENBUTSU NISA
YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!
I'M UNDERCOVER CONSTABLE HIKIJI SANGORŌ! LAY YOUR WEAPON DOWN!

SO ONE MORE OF YOU WAS HIDING!
WHOOSH
WHOOSH

SWISH!

PLONK

UGH!
SWOOSH!
THUMP
THUMP
THUMP
GASP!



THUD
THUD

YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!

WHOMP!

ARGH...

GAG...

G...
GOT HIM...!

北町奉行所

NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

THEY WERE PLAYING *BUTT SUMO*. I AM *SO* SORRY...

HA, HA.

SINCE NISA GOT CAUGHT IN THE END, I LET THEM GO WITH A *SCOLDING*, BUT IF HE HAD ESCAPED...

PERHAPS KASAJIRŌ AND SHINKO LOVE EACH OTHER *TOO MUCH*.

BOTH OF THEM HAVE MADE IT THROUGH SOME HARROWING BATTLES, AND KASA EVEN FACED *DEATH* ONCE.

THEY RISKED THEIR *LIVES* TO FALL IN *LOVE*. SUCH A COUPLE IS VERY...

THAT'S WHY I THINK THEY WERE ABLE TO BECOME "A COUPLE OF *JITTE*."

WHEN THEY'RE TOGETHER, THEY DO HAVE A LOT OF STRENGTHS. THEY CAN *ALWAYS* FIND THE KEY TO EVEN THE TOUGHEST OF CASES.

BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY CAN BE *TOO* CLOSE TO EACH OTHER AND LET THEIR GUARD DOWN. SINCE THIS COULD LEAD TO SOME VERY BAD CONSEQUENCES IN THE FUTURE...

...WHAT IF SHINKO WERE *SEPARATED* FROM KASAJIRŌ AND PAIRED WITH *HIKIJI* THE UNDERCOVER PATROLMAN? THIS WOULD BE A ONE-TIME TRIAL.

HMMM, HIKIJI, YOU SAY?

HIKIJI'S BETTER WITH THE LADIES THAN ANYONE ELSE. HE'S THE MANLIEST MAN IN THE NORTH.

IT WILL BE, HEH, *INTERESTING* TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS.

YOU'RE BEING *CRUEL.*

THIS IS A *TEST* THAT WILL ONLY *STRENGTHEN* THEM AS "A COUPLE OF *JITTE.*"

IF KASAJIRŌ IS UNABLE TO DO HIS JOB BECAUSE OF *THIS*, THEN THE "COUPLE OF *JITTE*" WILL NO LONGER BE EFFECTIVE.

THAT WOULD ALSO BE TRUE IF SHINKO RAN OFF WITH HIKIJI. THEY CAN ONLY BE "A COUPLE OF *JITTE*" IF THEY *TRUST* EACH OTHER.

AND THEN WHAT WOULD THE *OTHER ONE* DO? IF HE OR SHE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, THEN THE "COUPLE OF *JITTE*" WOULD NOT BE VERY EFFECTIVE, WOULD IT?

ONE DAY, *ONE* OF THEM MIGHT BE IN DANGER.

ISN'T THAT *CRUEL?*

COMMISSIONER, SURELY YOU DIDN'T UNITE THE "COUPLE OF *JITTE*" ON A WHIM.

AN OFFICIAL POST IS A MATTER OF *LIFE* AND *DEATH.* I AM DOING THIS BECAUSE THEY ARE SERVING AS A *COUPLE.*

I THINK THAT FORCING THEM TO WORK WITH A TOTAL STRANGER WILL, ON THE CONTRARY, ACTUALLY MAKE THEM *STRONGER* AS "A COUPLE OF *JITTE.*"

MOREOVER, EVEN I CAN SEE THAT THEY'RE NOT THE SORT OF COUPLE THAT WOULD BE EASILY SHAKEN UP. *THAT* IS PRECISELY WHY I MADE THEM A TEAM. IF THIS SORT OF THING WOULD LEAD TO THEM HURTING EACH OTHER, I WOULD NEVER HAVE MADE SHINKO TAKE UP THE *JITTE.*

IF YOU HAVE THAT MUCH FAITH IN THEM, FINE.

THEN I'LL DO IT.

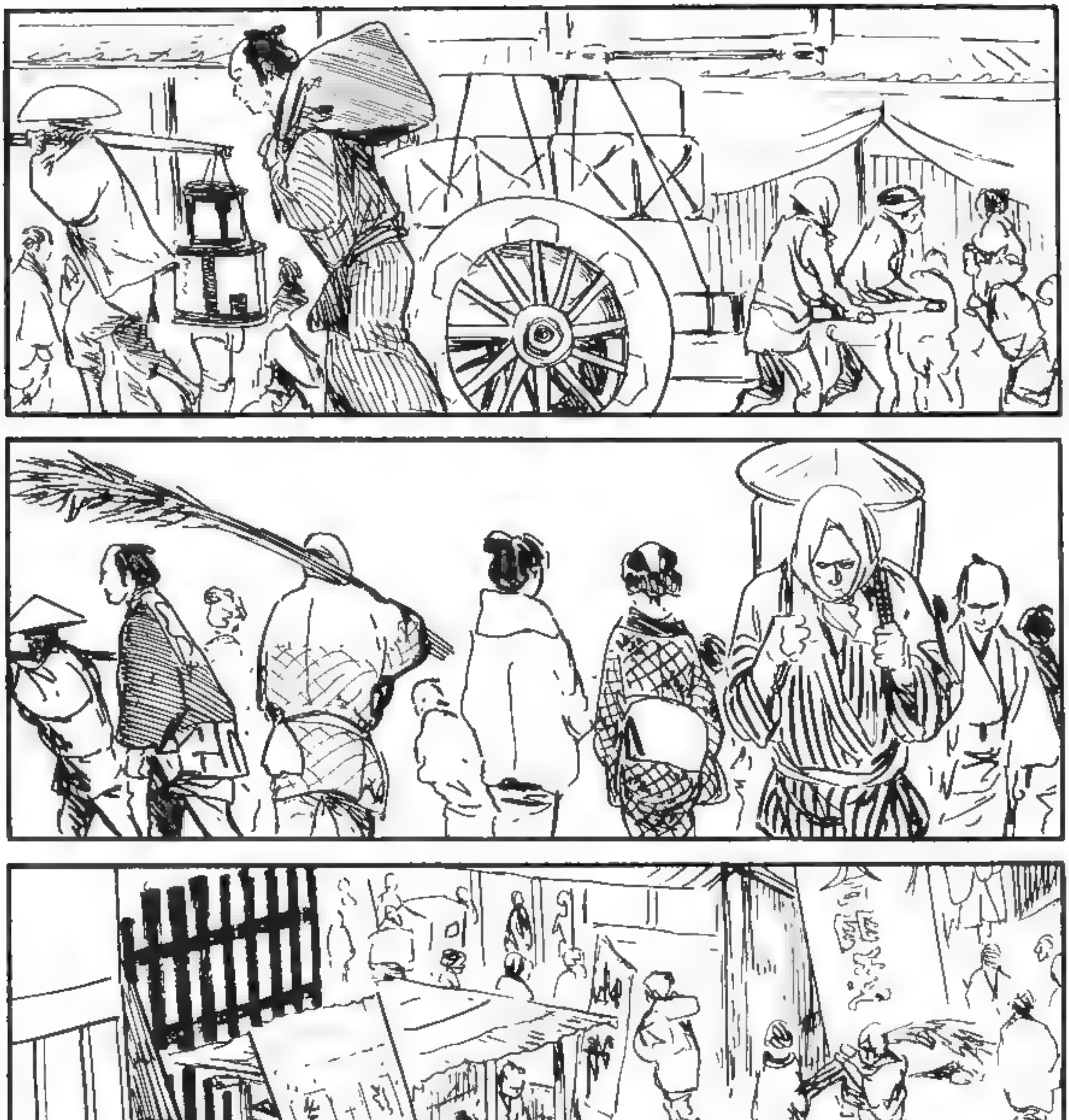
I'LL PUT MY PLAN INTO ACTION. IT'LL *STRENGTHEN* THE "COUPLE OF *JITTE.*"

I THANK ALL FOUR OF YOU FOR YOUR GREAT WORK. NOW I AM GOING TO REASSIGN YOU.

SAKANE, YOU'LL BE REUNITED WITH YOUR OLD PARTNER *SMOKY YAKICHI.*

HUH...?!

SHINKO, YOU'LL BE PAIRED WITH *HIKIJI SANGORŌ*, AND YOU'LL BE WORKING *UNDERCOVER* WITH HIM.



SLURPPP...
SLURRRP...

SLURPPP...
SLURRRP...

SLURPPP...
SLURRRP...

PUFF
PUFF

"BUT O-SHIN-*SAN*'S HUSBAND'S STILL EATING *WELL*, ISN'T HE?"

"HEH, HEH I'VE BEEN *BUSY* LATELY."

"WE'VE BEEN WORKING *DAY* AND *NIGHT*, SO HE'S BEEN EATING *OUT*. SHINKO'S BEEN LEAVING THE HOUSE FIRST WITHOUT PREPARING ANYTHING FOR HIM..."

"SO HOW'RE THEY TAKING IT? O-SHIN-*SAN*'S NOT COMPLAINING."

"LOOKS LIKE HE *UNDERSTANDS*. OUR UNDERCOVER TEAM'S GOT A *BIG CASE*."

"SHE DOESN'T TELL HIM ANYTHING ABOUT IT, DOES SHE?"

"WHY SHOULD SHE? BY THE TIME SHE GETS HOME, HE'S ALREADY *ASLEEP*."

"ASLEEP? HMPH. SHOULDN'T HE BE WORRIED ABOUT HIS CUTE WIFE ... ABOUT HER *AFFAIRS*?"

"THERE'S NO POINT IN ASKING OR WORRYING ABOUT THIS. IF I BOTHER HIM, *I'M* GOING TO BE THE ONE WHO LEAVES. SO HE'S NOT GOING TO BE TOO CONCERNED ABOUT ME.

"UP UNTIL NOW, HE'S JUST BEEN BLABBING AWAY, ACTING LIKE SOME HIGH AND MIGHTY LORD.

"BUT NOW HE'S PRETENDING TO BE MEEK AND MILD AND LETTING ME DO WHATEVER I WANT."

"HE MUST KNOW THAT."

"HEH. I SHOULD *TELL* HIM THAT."

SLURPPP... SLURPPP...

I DON'T KNOW IF I'VE SAID THIS ALREADY, BUT *THAT'S* NOT A SIGHT YOU SEE EVERY DAY.

HE'S EATING HIS *SEVENTH* ONE!

HE SURE DOES EAT A *LOT.*

A PLATE OF *MOCHI*... TWO PLATES' WORTH OF *DONBURI* RICE... HE'S HAD *FOURTEEN* PLATES OF FOOD! IT'S TIME TO PAY UP HA, HA.

YEAH...

WHY DON'T *WE* HAVE A COUPLE OF PLATES AND THEN GET GOING?

WE DON'T KNOW IF WE'LL BE ABLE TO EAT ANYTHING LATER. SO WE SHOULD EAT WHILE WE STILL CAN.

BUT WE'LL BE WITH *HIM*...

IT'S NO BIG DEAL.

SO WE'VE BECOME CLOSE FRIENDS. WHAT'S SO SHAMEFUL ABOUT *THAT*? WE'RE TOGETHER BECAUSE WE'RE ON *DUTY*.

COME ON, LET'S GO.

OOH... BURP.

HICCUP

COULD YOU MAKE US A COUPLE?
SURE.

DOESN'T LOOK LIKE YOU'RE MAKING MUCH THESE DAYS.

EVEN THOUGH YOU'VE GOT A GOOD *LOCATION*.
IT REALLY IS. ALL THESE PEOPLE ARE OUT THERE, YET...
ALL I CAN DO IS POUND AND BAKE MOCHI AND SIGH... NOTHING MORE...

WHY... IS THAT?

IT'S THE *CHARCOAL*. *THAT'S* THE PROBLEM.

HAS IT BECOME *THAT* EXPENSIVE?

THE PRICE'S GONE UP LIKE CRAZY. *EVERYTHING'S* GONE CRAZY. THAT'S WHY THE *MOCHI* COSTS TWENTY PERCENT MORE THAN YESTERDAY...

SO YOU'VE *RAISED* THE PRICE?!

YEAH. SORRY.

I SHOULDN'T HAVE EATEN SO MUCH.

IT CAN'T BE HELPED.

I GOTTA BAKE *MOCHI* WITH CHARCOAL, YOU KNOW.

THE CHARCOAL DEALERS OF HACHIŌJI HAVE *TOTAL* CONTROL OF THE MARKET HERE IN EDO. THEY'VE BEEN RAISING PRICES AND GORGING ON PROFITS.

SOME CHARCOAL IS ALSO COMING IN FROM KUMANO IN KISHŪ BUT ONLY IN DRIPS AND DROPS-- AND IT'S *NOT* CHEAP.

THANKS FOR WAITING.

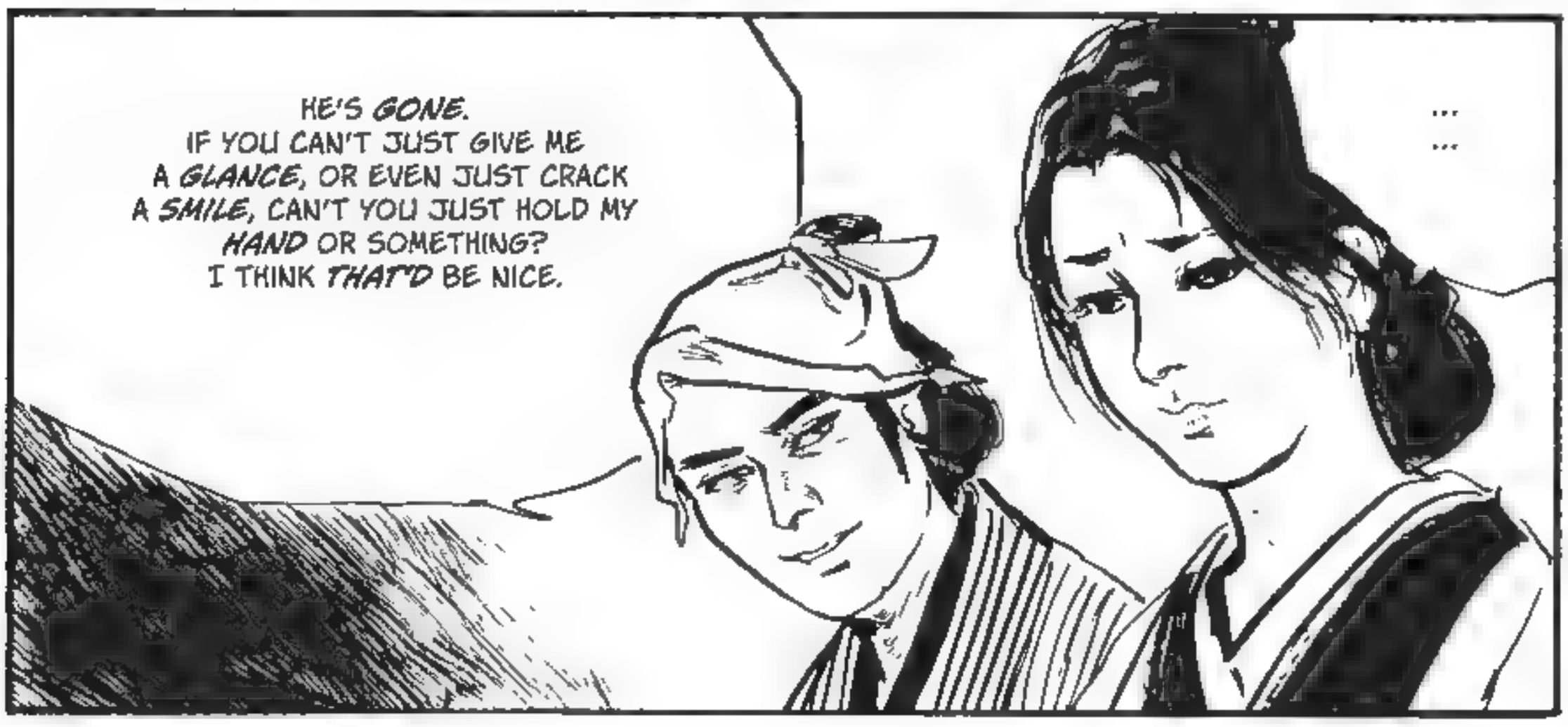
SLURPPP... SLURPPP...

RECENTLY I HEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS BUYING UP YASHŪ CHARCOAL AND BRINGING IT INTO EDO TO TRY TO SHUT OUT THE HACHIŌJI DEALERS...

...BUT WHO KNOWS WHEN *THAT'LL* HAPPEN? AND THERE'S NOTHING CAN *I* DO.

LET'S GO.

THANK YOU.


HE'S GONE.
IF YOU CAN'T JUST GIVE ME A GLANCE, OR EVEN JUST CRACK A SMILE, CAN'T YOU JUST HOLD MY HAND OR SOMETHING?
I THINK THAT'D BE NICE.
...
...

OH, BUT YOU CAN'T, BECAUSE YOU'RE *MARRIED*, RIGHT?

SLURPPP... SLURPPP...

OR IS IT BECAUSE YOU THINK WE'LL BE *EXPOSED* AS UNDERCOVER COPS?

EVEN IF SOMEONE *WERE* WATCHING US, HE WOULDN'T NOTICE.

I'M *SINGLE*, SO I WOULDN'T REALLY KNOW, BUT I *DON'T* THINK THAT'S WHAT A COUPLE'S LOVE IS LIKE.

YOU'RE VERY LUCKY TO BE PART OF AN UNDERCOVER TEAM... ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING THAT YOU'RE A *WOMAN*.

OH, IS THAT SO?

I DON'T GET IT. WHY DON'T WE GO *FOLLOW* HIM? WE DON'T HAVE MUCH *ELSE* TO DO UNTIL NIGHTFALL.

LET'S GO.

WE HAVE TO GO LOOK FOR THE WAREHOUSES WITH THE *HIDDEN CHARCOAL*...

...ANYWAY, WE'LL HAVE A *LOT* TO SEARCH THROUGH EVEN INSIDE JUST *ONE* WAREHOUSE.

BRRR... IT'S *COLD.*

YOU OKAY, O-SHIN-*SAN*?

I'M *FINE.*

THE NIGHT'S *FINALLY* OVER.

WE *TRIED* TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR *CHARCOAL* BEING HIDDEN IN WAREHOUSES, BUT WE ONLY MANAGED TO WEAR *OURSELVES* OUT. AND WHAT'S MORE, THERE'S THIS BLASTED *COLD.* UNDERCOVER WORK IS NO FUN. BRRR...

SAY, O-SHIN-*SAN*...

...WE'VE BEEN WORKING TOGETHER *CONTINUOUSLY ALL DAY* AND *NIGHT* FOR *FOUR DAYS* NOW. HOW'RE THINGS GOING?

W-WHAT DO YOU MEAN, HOW?

YOUR HUSBAND ISN'T *JEALOUS*. HE'S NOT EVEN *WORRIED*.

HE'S THE SAME AS ALWAYS, GOING TO BED AFTER COMING HOME. WHEN I WAKE UP, HE'S ALREADY GONE. AND WHEN HE COMES HOME, I'M NOT YET THERE.

I WAS ASKING ABOUT *YOU*.

...

...

WE WON'T BE SPENDING MORE THAN *TEN DAYS* LIKE THIS.

THAT HOTHEAD HUSBAND OF YOURS WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE IT, WON'T HE?

BUT IF A WOMAN WANTED TO, SHE COULD TAKE IT FOR A *MONTH* OR TWO.

HE'S GOING OUT TO *EAT* SOMEONE ELSE'S FOOD.

COULD HE ALSO BE GOING OUT TO HAVE HIS *NEEDS* TAKEN CARE OF BY *SOMEONE ELSE?*

YOU CAN'T SAY *THAT,* 'CAUSE WE'RE *PARTNERS.*

WORKING WITH WOMEN HAS ALL SORTS OF *PROBLEMS.* SOMETIMES THEY CAN BE IN A *BAD MOOD.*

AND ON *THOSE* DAYS, THEY CAN'T DO THEIR JOBS. THEY GET *MAD* AND LOSE THEIR *JUDGMENT.*

THAT'S WHY I'VE *GOT* TO KNOW *ALL* ABOUT YOU, O-SHIN-*SAN!* RIGHT DOWN TO WHEN YOU HAVE YOUR *PERIOD!*

I WANT TO SEE THE *KAPPA* ON YOUR BACK IF I CAN, I'M GOING TO GET YOU *WET WITHOUT* GOING TO THE WATER. *THEN* WE CAN BE THE *BEST* OF PARTNERS.

...
...

O-SHIN-*SAN*, I GET THE FEELING YOUR HUSBAND WON'T *UNDERSTAND*.

HOW COULD HE...?

WHEN WE SAW HIM AT THE *MOCHI* PLACE JUST NOW, HE WAS LIKE *ANOTHER MAN*. EVEN AFTER HEARING ABOUT HIM FROM YOU, I COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL THAT WAY.

HA, HA. SINCE YOU'VE ALREADY COME THIS FAR WITH ME, ALL I CAN DO IS *LAUGH*.

I *AM* TRYING TO COURT YOU, BUT I'M *NOT* JOKING. I'M *SERIOUS*.

WHEN WE WERE ORDERED TO WORK TOGETHER, I THINK YOUR HUSBAND WAS *RESIGNED* TO IT

IF HE WEREN'T, HE WOULDN'T ACT LIKE HE DIDN'T CARE.

YOUR HUSBAND PUTS HIS *DUTIES* FIRST. WHEN HE PUTS HIS MIND TO SOMETHING, THE POWER OF HIS WILL IS *AMAZING*, ISN'T IT?

IT'S *CHILD'S PLAY* FOR HIM TO PUT ON AN ACT AND HIDE HIS FEELINGS.

SO IS *THAT* WHY YOU...?

NO MATTER WHAT, I'M NOT *THAT* BRAVE. IF YOUR HUSBAND WERE EVER PREPARED FOR THE *WORST*, WHAT WOULD *YOU* DO, O-SHIN-*SAN*?

THAT MAN IS MY *LIFE*.

IF HE *EVER* FELT THAT WAY, I'D *KILL* HIM, AND THEN I'D *DIE*.

YOU WON'T *EVER* TIRE OF HIM. I DIDN'T THINK YOU LOVED HIM *THAT* MUCH.

DO YOU WANT TO SLEEP WITH ME *THAT* BADLY?!

DIDN'T I SAY I WASN'T *THAT* BRAVE?

BUT WE SHOULD SLEEP TOGETHER AS *PARTNERS*. YOUR *HUSBAND* WOULD ALLOW THAT, THOUGH YOU HAVEN'T SAID WHETHER *YOU* WOULD.

YOU'RE NOT HOLDING *ANYTHING* BACK, ARE YOU, HIKIJI-*SAN*? IF YOU KEEP THIS UP, HE'S GOING TO *KILL* YOU.

WELL, THEN! SO WHAT? MEN *LIKE* NEW THINGS. EVEN WITH WOMEN... IF I *DEFLOWER* SOMEONE, I'M NEVER GONNA LET HER GO.

BUT SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN *STAINED* BY OTHERS... I CAN JUST GIVE HER UP. IT'S BECAUSE I DON'T CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO HER. I CAN ALWAYS *REPLACE* HER.

DO YOU MEAN TO SAY OTHER PEOPLE STAINED *ME*?!

I WAS A *CRIMINAL!* EVEN SO, KASAJIRŌ WAS MY *FIRST* MAN!

BUT I DIDN'T *ACT* LIKE A VIRGIN. *I* MADE THE FIRST MOVE WHEN HE PASSED OUT.

HE WAS SO *CUTE.* I COULDN'T RESIST.

I GUESS I'LL ASK... WHO DID THE TATTOO ON YOUR BACK?!

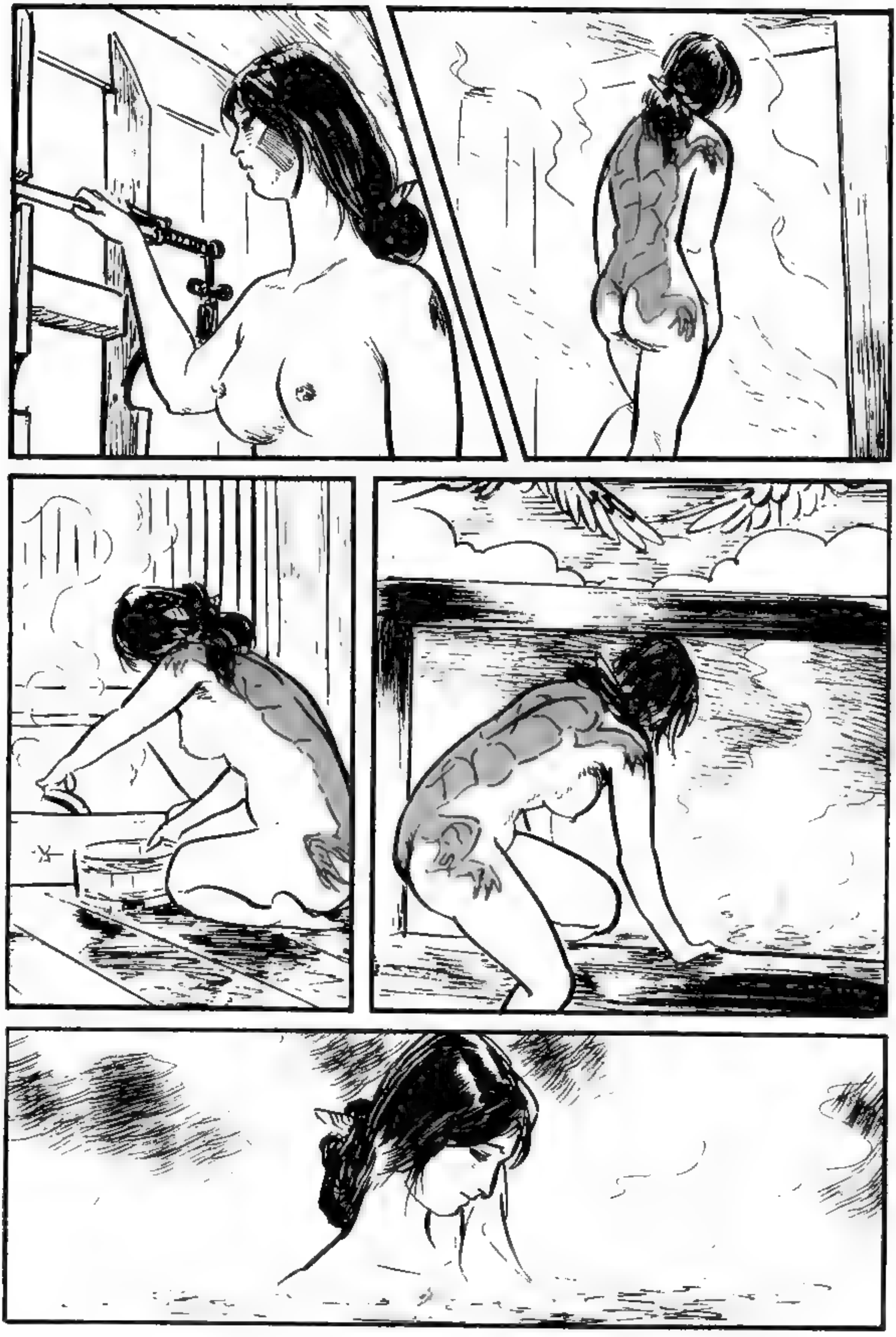
CRACK

EVEN IF YOU DIDN'T GET ALONG WITH HIM, THE FACT REMAINS THAT YOUR SKIN HAS BEEN TOUCHED BY *ANOTHER MAN.*
I THINK I'VE SAID *TOO MUCH.* I GUESS I SHOULD GET *GOING.*
WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A *BATH* BEFORE YOU GO HOME? I MIGHT'VE CAUGHT A *COLD*, SO I'M GONNA CALL IT *QUITS* FOR TODAY.

WELCOME...

OH, YOU'RE SAKANE-*SAMA*'S WIFE, AND YOU'RE ON DUTY.

YES.

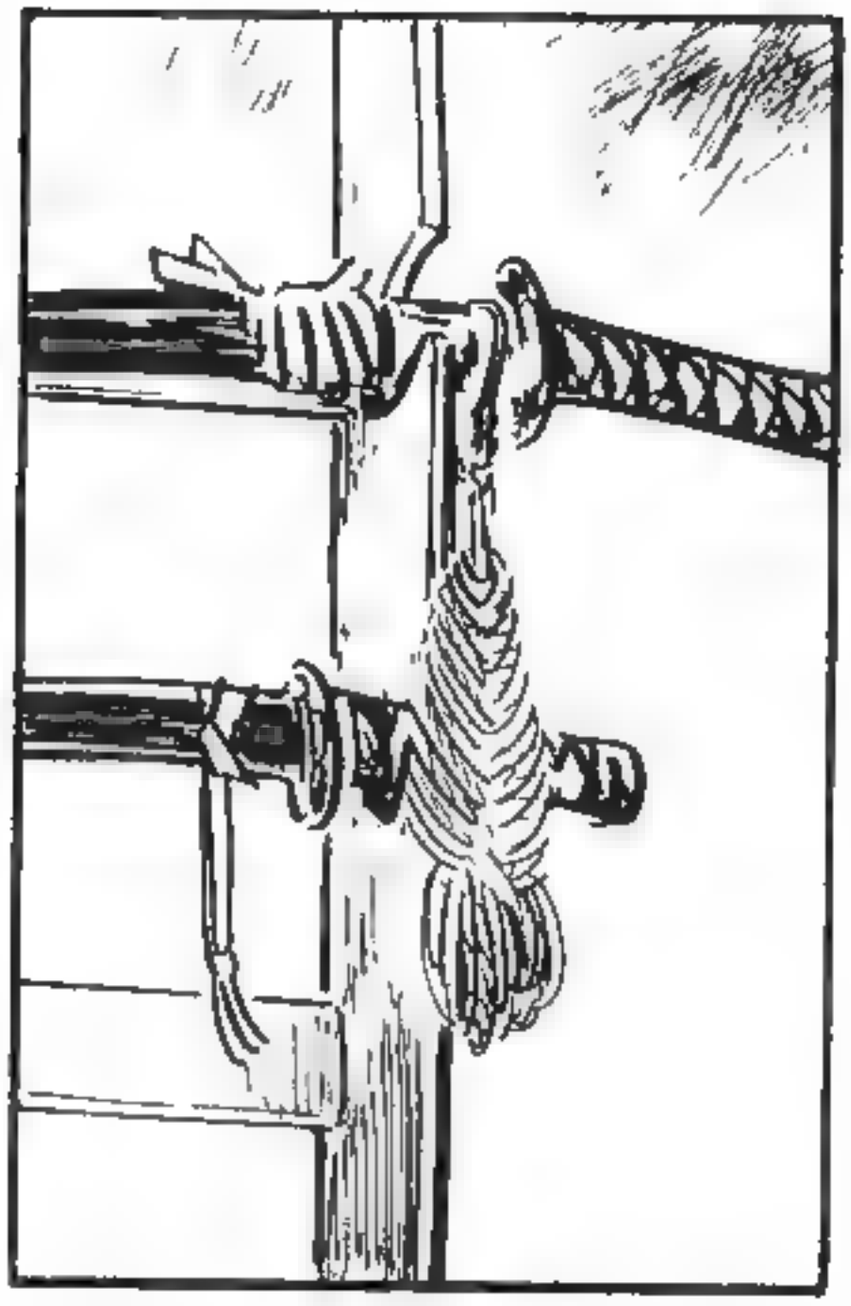


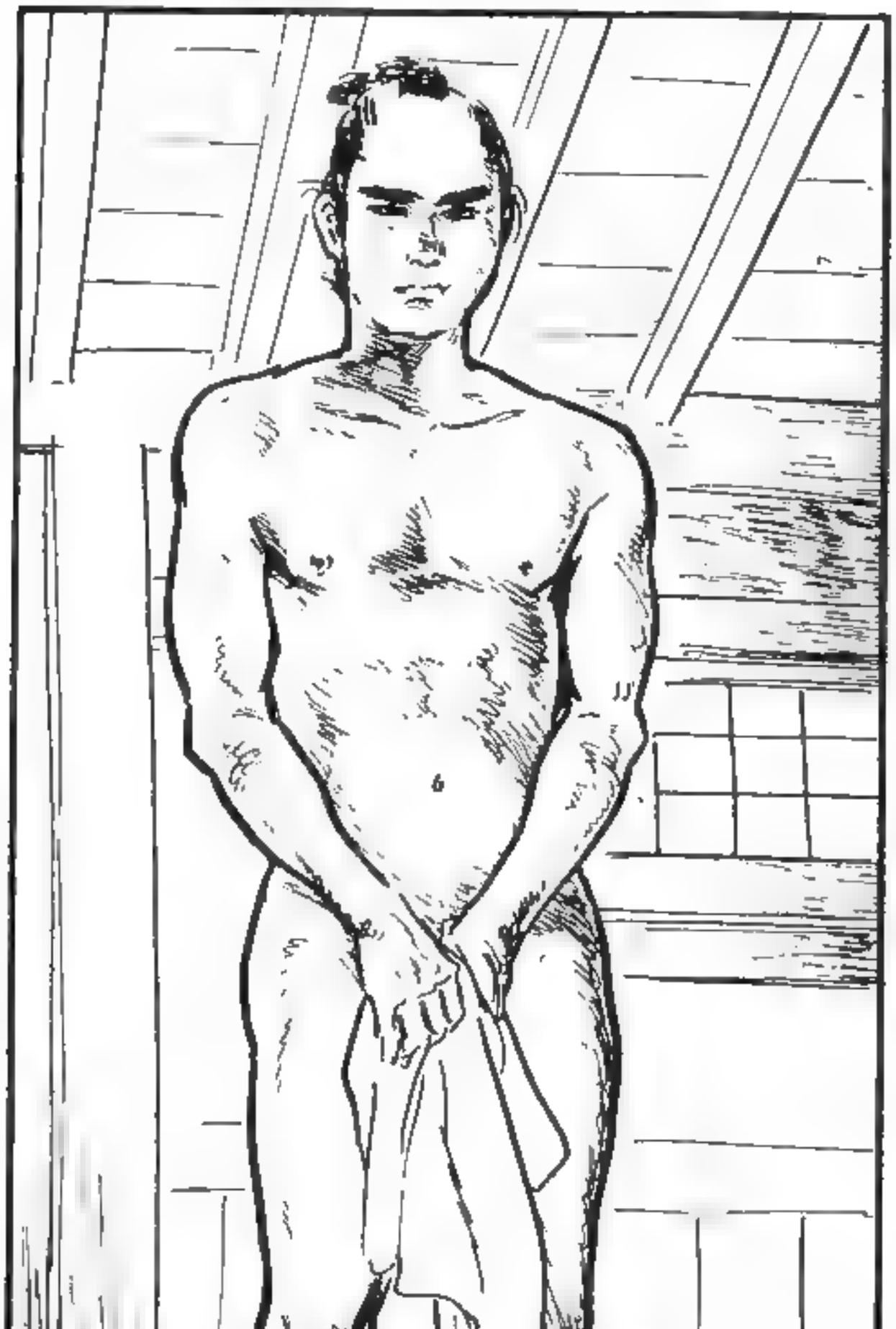
WELCOME!

I'M GONNA TAKE A BATH AFTER ALL.

WE'RE *PARTNERS.* IT'S *NORMAL* FOR US TO BATHE TOGETHER.

WELCOME!





SPLOOSH

AHHH...

S-SAKANE-*UJI*... TH-THERE'S A *REASON* FOR THIS...

PLEASE DON'T TAKE THIS THE WRONG WAY. LET ME *EXPLAIN*....

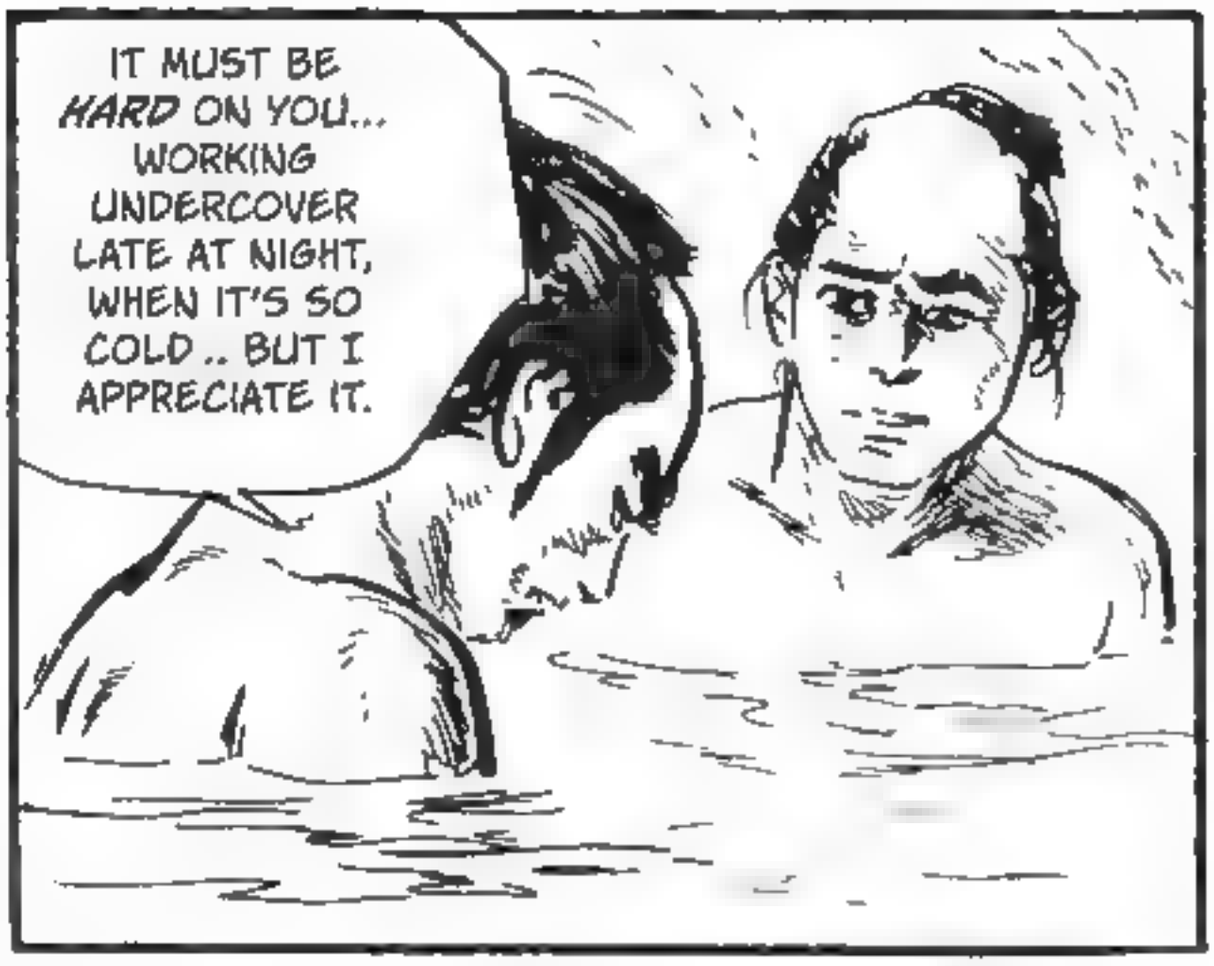
W-WE WERE GOING UNDERCOVER LAST NIGHT AS *BAD GUYS* FOR A STAKEOUT...

IF YOU SAW ME IN *DISGUISE*, YOU'D *UNDERSTAND*.

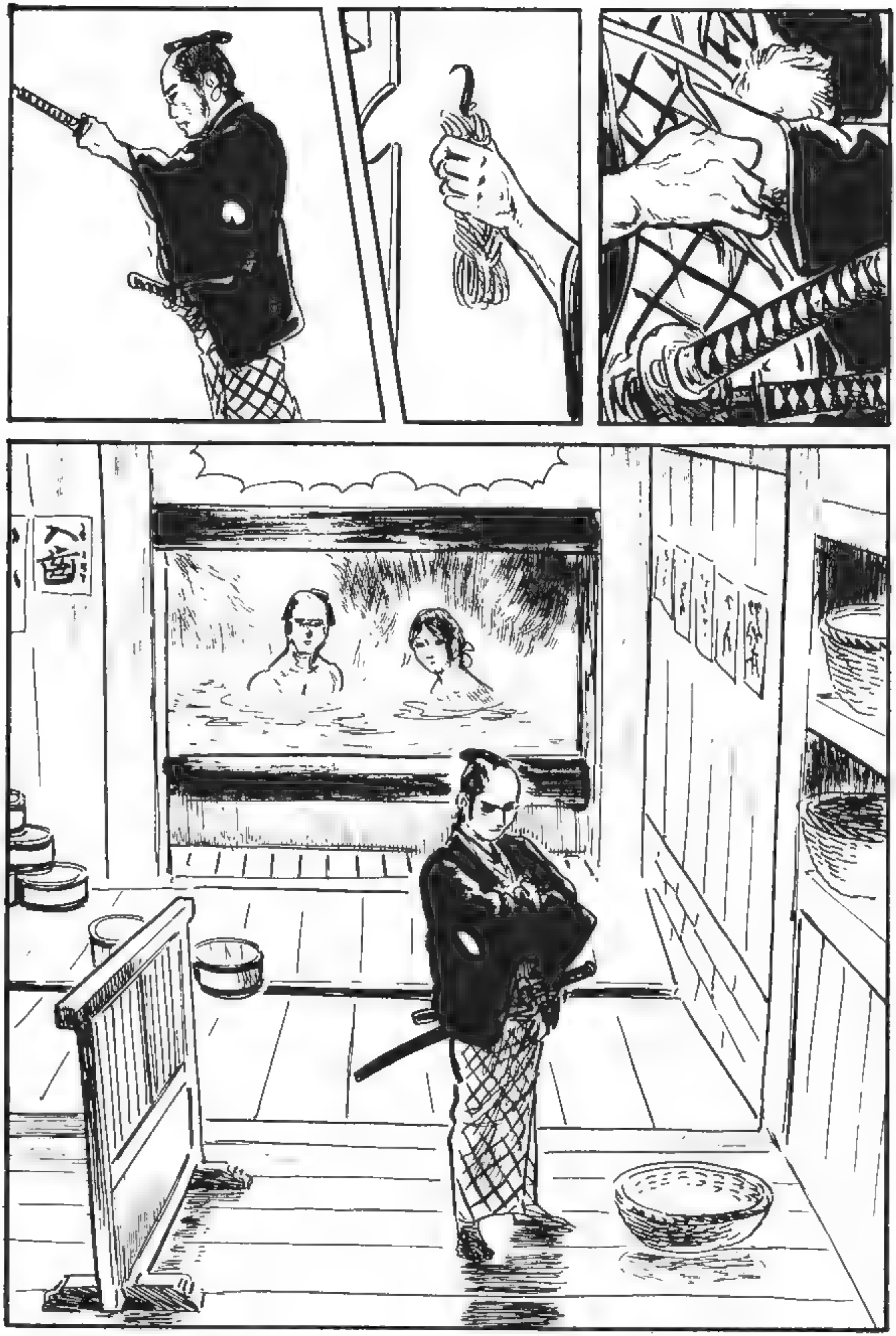
A-AND O-SHIN-*SAN*, I MEAN, *YOUR WIFE*, SHE CAME IN HERE FIRST WITHOUT ME KNOWING IT...

AND THEN *I* CAME, AND...

SPLOOSH


IT MUST BE *HARD* ON YOU... WORKING UNDERCOVER LATE AT NIGHT, WHEN IT'S SO COLD .. BUT I APPRECIATE IT.

GOTTA GO NOW...
'SCUSE ME.


八百

I'M SORRY, O-SHIN-SAN. I WON'T LOOK WHEN YOU GET OUT OF THE WATER.

GLUB

THIS HAS ALL BEEN ONE BIG MISTAKE ON MY PART.

I AM *SO* ASHAMED OF MYSELF. I WANT TO CRAWL INTO A *HOLE*.

WHEN HE WAS SOAKING HIS FACE, I FELT AS IF *FLAMES* WERE COMING OUT OF IT-- AND THE *HOT* WATER BECAME SO *COLD*.

O-SHIN-*SAN*, I THINK YOU MUST HAVE FELT THOSE FLAMES TOO. YOUR HUSBAND'S *EYES*...

HE WASN'T LOOKING AT YOU AS HIS *WIFE*... AS HIS *WOMAN*.

HE WAS LOOKING AT YOU AS HIS *COLLEAGUE*... AS A *JITTE* WOMAN. HE WAS *THANKING* YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF HIS *HEART*.

HE *MEANT* IT WHEN HE SAID HE APPRECIATED YOUR WORK. EVEN *I* COULD FIGURE OUT THAT MUCH. AND OF COURSE, *YOU* DID TOO.

HE WASN'T JEALOUS. HE WASN'T LOOKING AT US AS A *MAN* AND A *WOMAN*.

I SAID HE WAS PUTTING ON AN ACT WHEN HE WAS EATING *MOCHI*. BUT HE WAS ACTUALLY JUST BEING *CONSIDERATE*-- AS A *JITTE* MAN SHOULD BE.

HE COULDN'T EVEN *IMAGINE* DOING ANYTHING BAD TO US. NOT EVEN THE *SLIGHTEST* THING.

HE *TRUSTED* YOU, O-SHIN-*SAN*. *AND* HE CONSIDERED YOUR DUTIES TO BE *MORE* IMPORTANT THAN *ANYTHING* ELSE. HIS *EYES*-- AND HIS *BEHAVIOR*-- WERE *TOTALLY FOCUSED*.

I, ON THE OTHER HAND, THOUGHT I MIGHT *SLEEP* WITH YOU SINCE YOUR HUSBAND *UNDERSTOOD*. IF NOT, I DIDN'T THINK WE'D WORK OUT AS PARTNERS.

I WAS MORE INTERESTED IN *YOU* THAN IN MY *JOB*... I'VE BEEN SO *PETTY*...

YOUR HUSBAND'S A *GREAT* MAN, O-SHIN-*SAN*.

I WAS *WRONG* ABOUT HIM... HE SURE FOOLED *ME*.

HE'S A *GREAT* MAN...

SINCE *WHEN*...

...WAS HE EVER... SO...

諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅爲樂

ALL THINGS ARE IMPERMANENT
THIS IS THE LAW OF LIFE AND EXTINCTION
WHEN BOTH LIFE AND EXTINCTION PERISH
NIRVANA WILL BE BLISS.

AT FIRST ALL I COULD THINK ABOUT WAS HIKIJI-*DONO* AND SHINKO. I COULDN'T KEEP MY MIND ON MY WORK.

諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅爲樂

I WAS LYING IN BED *ALONE* NIGHT AFTER NIGHT.

I KEPT FANTASIZING ABOUT WHETHER THEY'D DO IT OR NOT. I COULDN'T SLEEP A WINK.

WHEN SHE'D COME HOME EARLY IN THE MORNING, I THOUGHT SHE'D GET MAD IF I SAID ANYTHING.

SO I *PRETENDED* TO SLEEP AND JUST PUT UP WITH IT.

WHEN I HAPPENED TO RUN INTO THEM, THE MUSCLES IN MY FACE FELT LIKE THEY WERE CRAMPING UP.

DON'T LOOK AT THEM, DON'T LOOK AT THEM, I TOLD MYSELF. I ENDED UP *LEAVING*...

YAMADA-*SAMA*, THAT WAS WHEN YOU TOLD ME THAT IF I COULD SUPERIMPOSE THINGS AND THEN SPLIT THEM IN MY MIND, NOTHING WOULD REMAIN. I COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU MEANT.

THEN THIS MORNING I SAW SHINKO GO INTO THE BATHHOUSE. HIKIJI WENT IN AFTER HER. MY BLOOD WAS *BOILING*. I THEN WENT IN, READY TO TAKE *DRASTIC* MEASURES IF THEY WERE BATHING *TOGETHER*.

AT THAT MOMENT I SLIPPED ON THE FROST.

WHEN I SPUN IN THE AIR AND HIT MY HEAD, I SUPERIMPOSED THE TWO OF THEM ON TOP OF EACH OTHER IN MY MIND AND SPLIT THEM IN HALF.

IT WAS JUST AS YOU SAID, YAMADA-*SAMA*. WHEN A SWORDSMAN IS ABOUT TO SLASH HIS OPPONENT, HE FIRST TRIES TO SLASH HIM WITH HIS *MENTAL* SWORD. IF HE *BELIEVES* HE CAN SLASH HIM, HE *WILL* BE ABLE TO SLASH HIM AT ANY MOMENT

SECURE IN THAT BELIEF, HE NO LONGER FEELS *ANY* NEED TO SLASH HIS OPPONENT. I *FINALLY* UNDERSTOOD WHAT YOU MEANT.

WASN'T SHE *MY WIFE?* WASN'T SHE ALWAYS SLEEPING BY *MY SIDE?*

COULDN'T I SLASH HER AT *ANY* MOMENT?! WHAT WAS I GETTING ALL FLUSTERED FOR?!

THAT'S WHAT I WAS THINKING WHEN I GOT UP AND *LAUGHED.*

AT THAT MOMENT I NO LONGER FELT *ANY* NEED TO SLASH THEM.

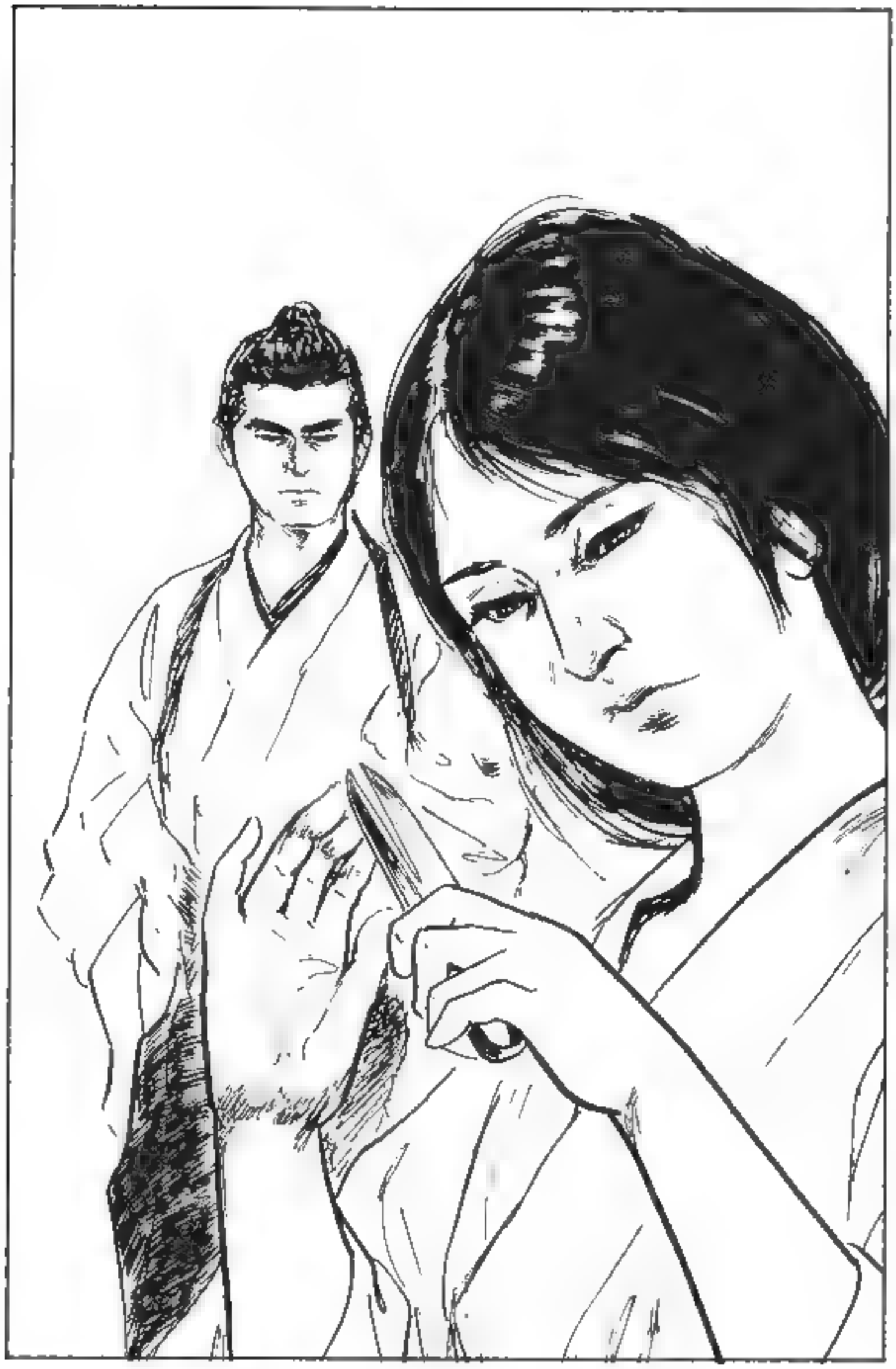
AND THEN WHEN I ENTERED THE BATHHOUSE AND SAW THE *DISGUISE* HE HAD TAKEN OFF...

..I FELT *SORRY* FOR HIM. IT HAD BEEN SO *COLD* THAT NIGHT. THAT'S WHY I MEANT IT WHEN I *THANKED* THEM FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART.

IT WAS AS IF I HAD ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO SLASH *MY OWN HEART...*

the fifty-third

Sixty Day Nails

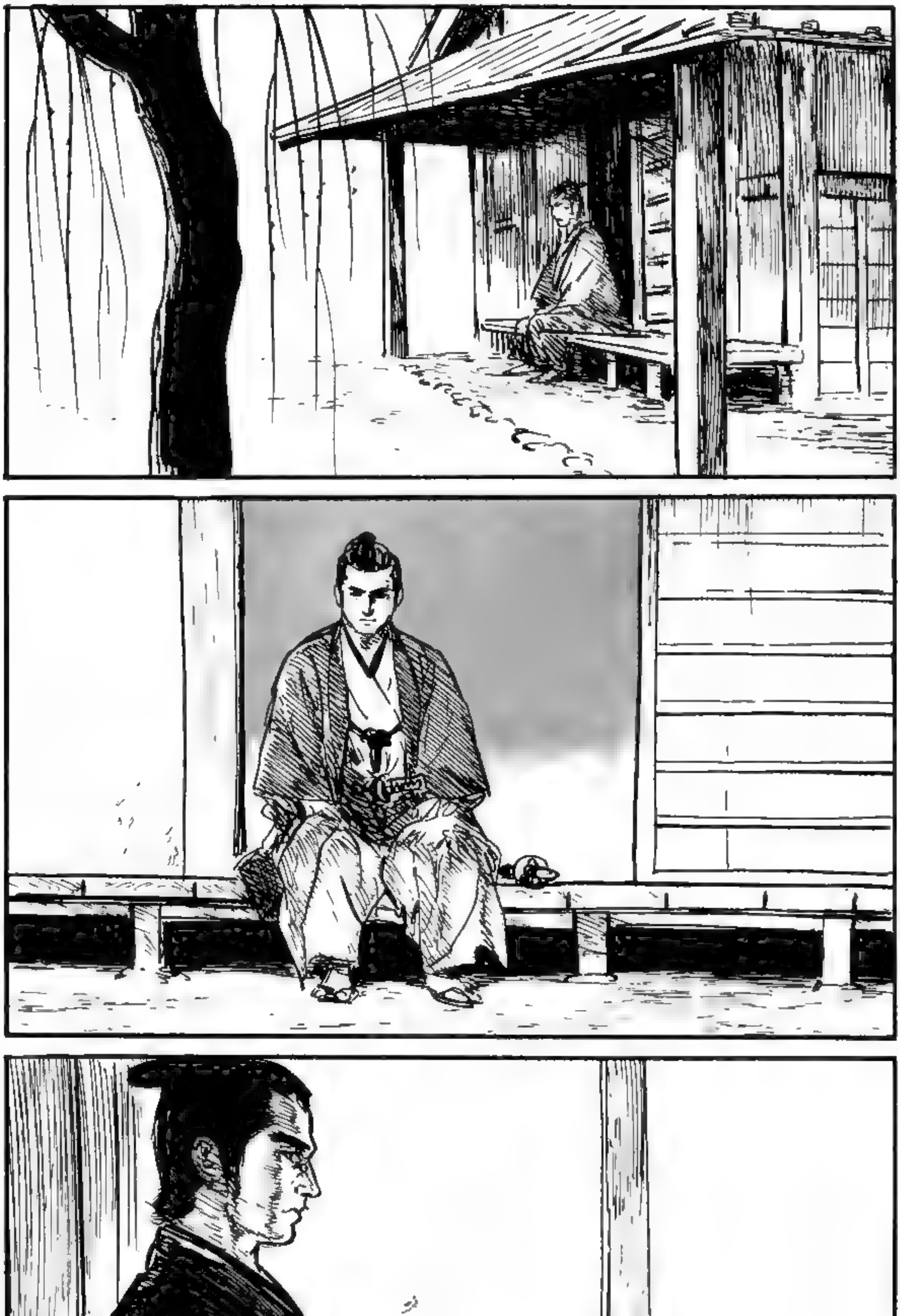


I HEARD HER HUSBAND WAS A *RŌNIN*. SEEMS HE USED TO BE *SOMEBODY*.

WHEN A SAMURAI ENDS UP A *RONIN*, HE BECOMES *LESS THAN NOTHIN'*. THAT GUY'S A *NOBODY* NOW.

HE WAS ALSO *SICK* FOR A *LONG* TIME.
THEY SAY SHE *STRANGLED* HIM. SHE MUST BE SOME WOMAN.
MAYBE SHE HAD *ANOTHER MAN*, AN' HE JUST GOT IN THE *WAY*.

MAYBE.
SHE MUST BE *OLD*, BUT SHE SURE IS REAL *GOOD-LOOKIN'*.



HER NEIGHBORS *SAW* HER STRANGLE HIM. SHE GOT BUSTED *RIGHT AWAY.*

I HEARD SHE HASN'T SAID A *WORD* SINCE SHE WAS INTERROGATED. IS SHE *TOUGH* OR WHAT?

EVEN IN *PRISON,* THE OTHER LADIES WERE IN *AWE* OF HER.

YAAAWN

SHE KNEW HOW TO BOW LIKE A *REAL* LADY. EVEN THE *HEAD PRISONER* FELT OUTTA PLACE NEXT TO *HER!*

SHE'S ALWAYS VERY *CALM* AN' *GRACEFUL* WHEN SHE *EATS* AN' EVEN WHEN SHE *SHITS*.

IS SHE GONNA BE THAT WAY WHEN SHE COMES OUT?

GRATEFUL? FOR WHAT?

WHADDAYA MEAN, SHE'S GRACEFUL WHEN SHE *SHITS*?

I SAID *GRACEFUL*, YOU KNOW, LIKE A REAL CLASSY *LADY*.

OH.

SHE STEP OVER THE SHITHOLE LIKE *THIS*...

...AN' COMES OVER LIKE *THIS*...

THAT'S *GROSS!*

UGH!

SHE DON'T EVEN SPREAD HER THIGHS WHEN SHE *SLEEPS.*

SO *THAT'S* SLEEPIN' GRACEFUL, HUH?

YEAH. SHE DON'T TALK TO *NOBODY.*

SHE'S ALWAYS *CALM.* *NOTHIN'* SCARES HER.

NONE OF THE OTHER LADIES WOULD DARE LAY A *FINGER* ON HER. SHE LOOKED LIKE SHE WAS READY TO BITE HER TONGUE AN' COMMIT *SUICIDE* IF ANYBODY TRIED ANYTHIN'.

AN' IN LESS THAN HALF AN HOUR, SHE'S GONNA BE SITTING RIGHT *THERE.*

WHY DON'T WE WATCH REAL CAREFULLY AND SEE HOW SHE *DIES?*

I'M ALWAYS WONDERIN' IF THERE'S SOME LADY WHO DON'T TAKE A LEAK BEFORE SHE GETS HER HEAD CHOPPED OFF.

EV'RY TIME WE TAKE A CORPSE AWAY, THERE'S A *PUDDLE.*

ALL THE LADIES WE CARRIED AWAY 'TIL NOW WOULD *DRIP* EVEN *AFTER* THEIR HEADS GOT CUT OFF.

I GOT A FEELIN' THAT A CLASSY LADY AIN'T GONNA LEAK.

YEAH, BUT SO WHAT IF SHE'S GRACEFUL *NOW*? IN THE END...

...ALL LADIES GOT THE *SAME* INSIDES.

LET'S *BET.*

'KAY.

SNIP

SNIP

IF YOU HAVE ANY *LAST WORDS*, I'LL *LISTEN*.

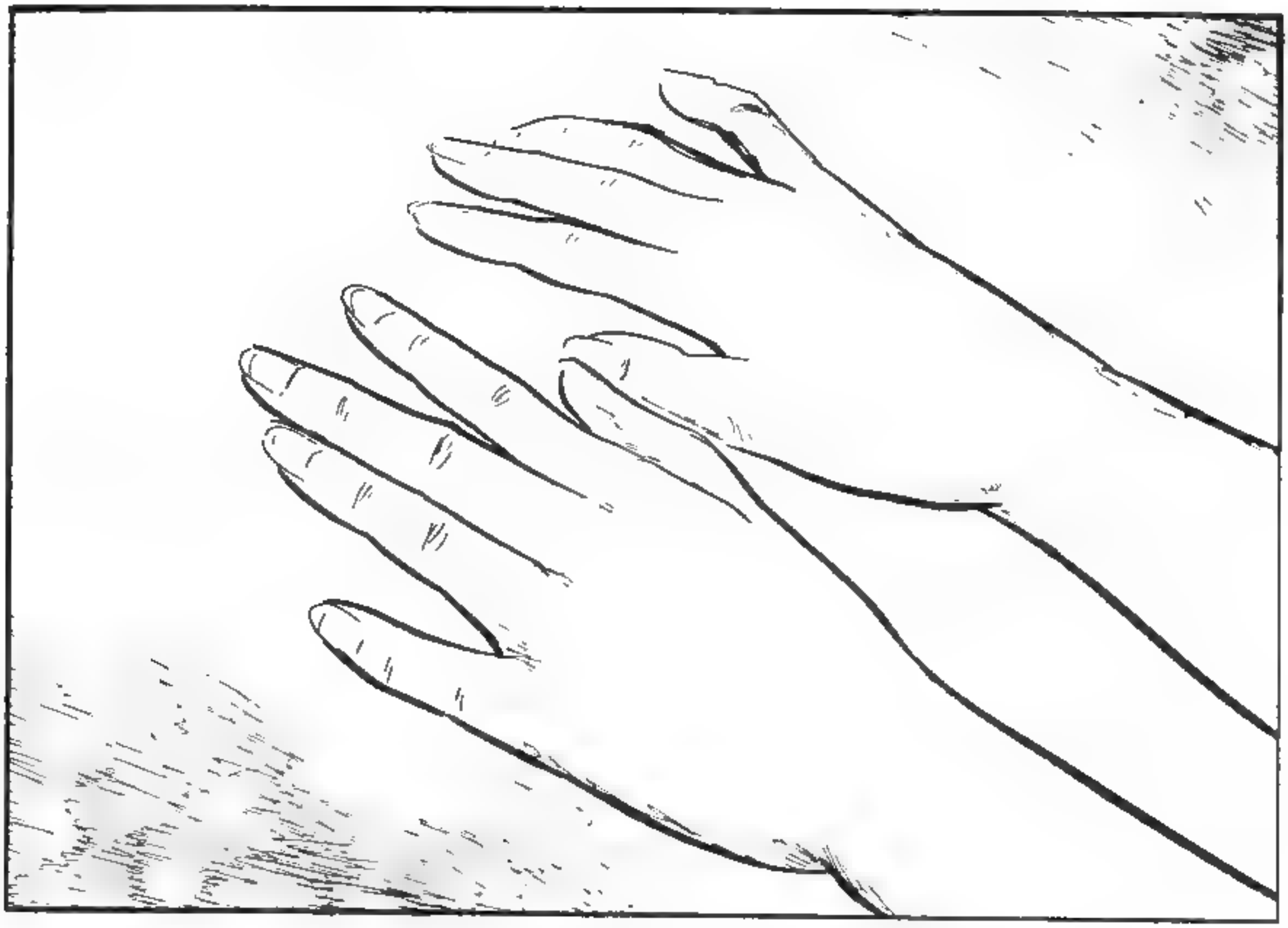
WHAT *DAY* IS IT TODAY?

THE *SIXTH.*

NOW THAT YOU HAVE ANSWERED MY QUESTION, I HAVE BUT ONE *FAVOR* TO ASK YOU.

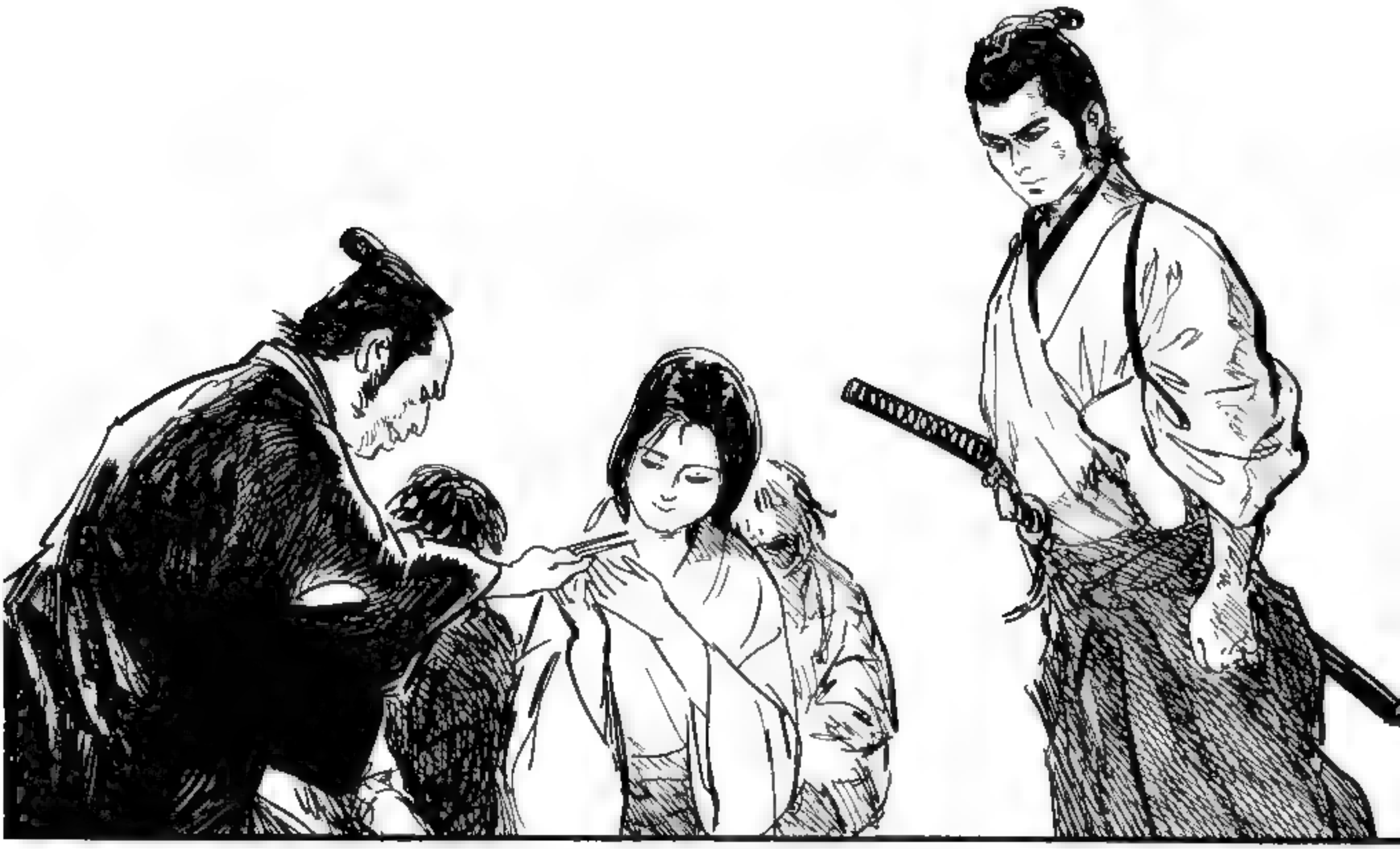
I WAS BORN IN THE *WEST,* AND IT IS THE CUSTOM THERE TO OBSERVE THE *END* OF THE YEAR ON THE *SIXTH* AND THE *NEW* YEAR ON THE *SEVENTH.*

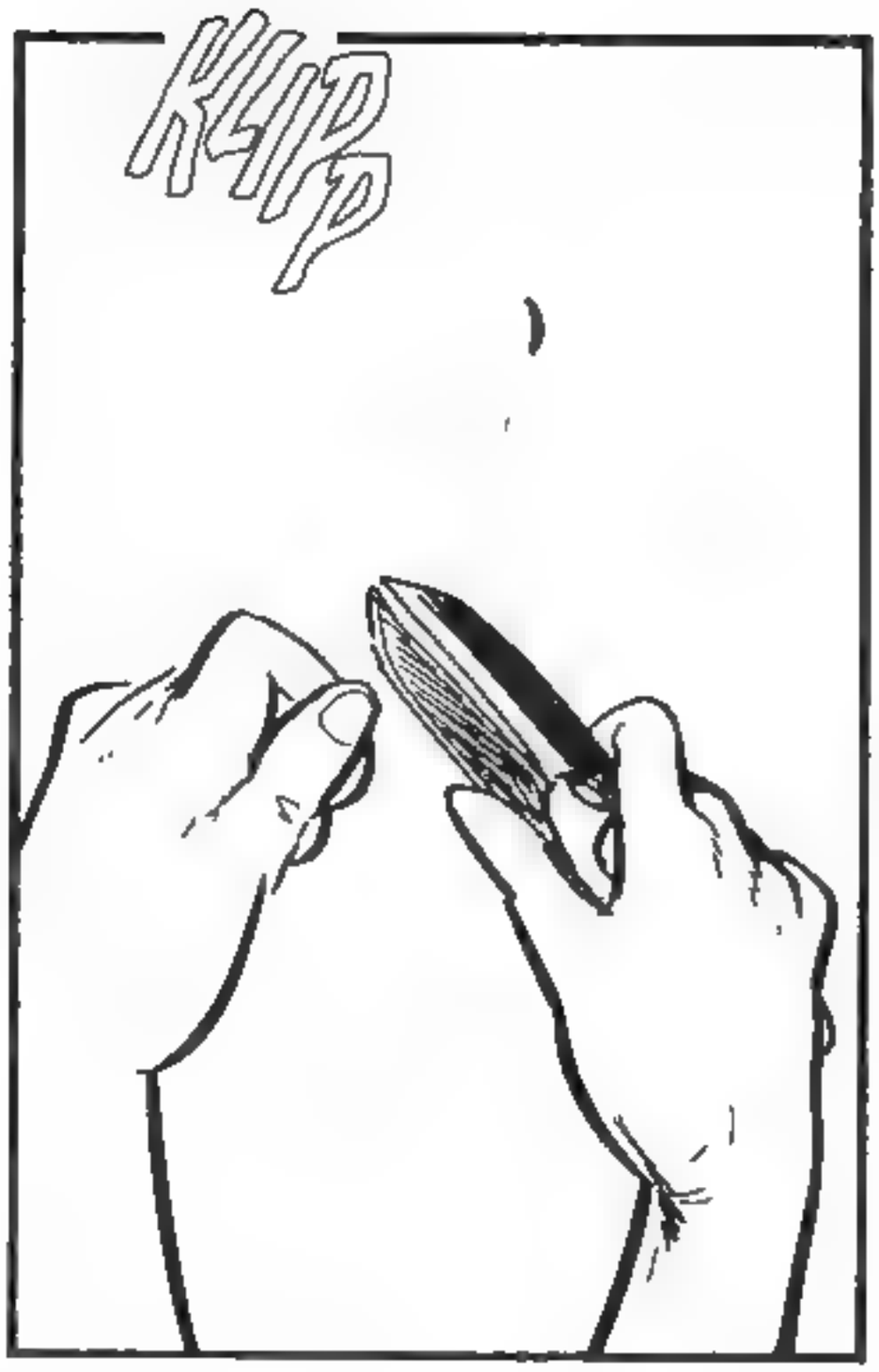
WOULD YOU PLEASE LET ME CUT OFF MY "SIXTH DAY NAILS"?
YOUR... NAILS?
YES. THEY'VE GROWN SO *LONG* IN *PRISON*.

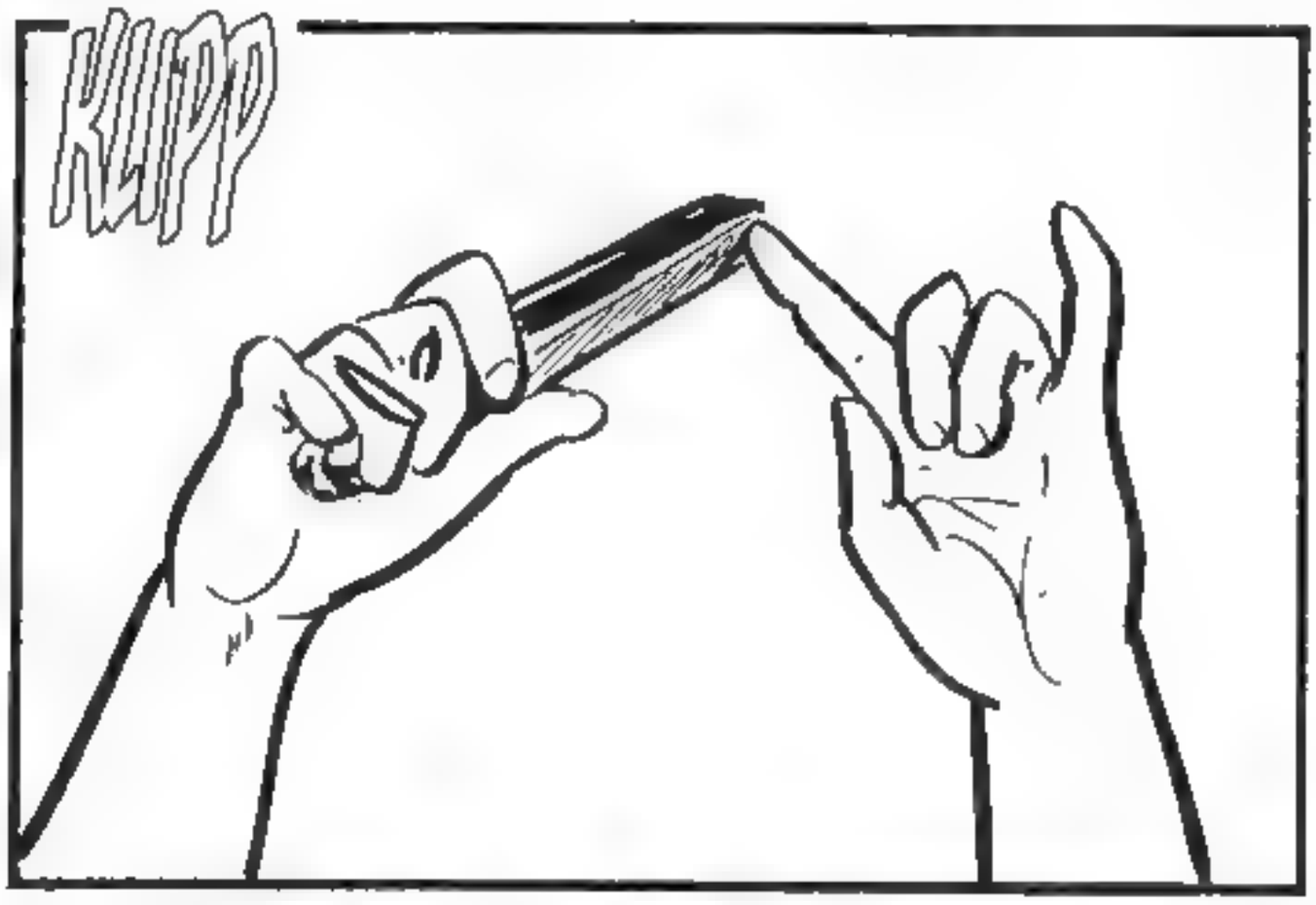


YOU MAY.
THANK YOU.

SOMEONE GIVE ME A PAIR OF CLIPPERS.




KLIPP


KLIPP

KLIPP

"I HEARD HER HUSBAND WAS A RŌNIN. SEEMS HE USED TO BE SOMEBODY.
"WHEN A SAMURAI ENDS UP A RŌNIN, HE BECOMES LESS THAN NOTHIN'.

"THAT GUY'S A NOBODY NOW.

"HE WAS ALSO SICK FOR A LONG TIME.

"THEY SAY SHE STRANGLED HIM. SHE MUST BE SOME WOMAN."

KLIPP

THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO ASK.

IT'S ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND'S NAILS...

I HAVE HEARD THAT HE WAS *ILL* FOR A *LONG* TIME. YET HIS *NAILS* HAD BEEN CUT AROUND THE TIME OF HIS *DEATH*. IS THAT CORRECT?

YES.

DID *YOU* CUT THEM?

Y-YES.

I WOULD LIKE TO ASK *WHEN* YOU CUT THEM.

IT WAS RIGHT BEFORE I *LAID MY HANDS* ON MY HUSBAND.

IS THAT SO?

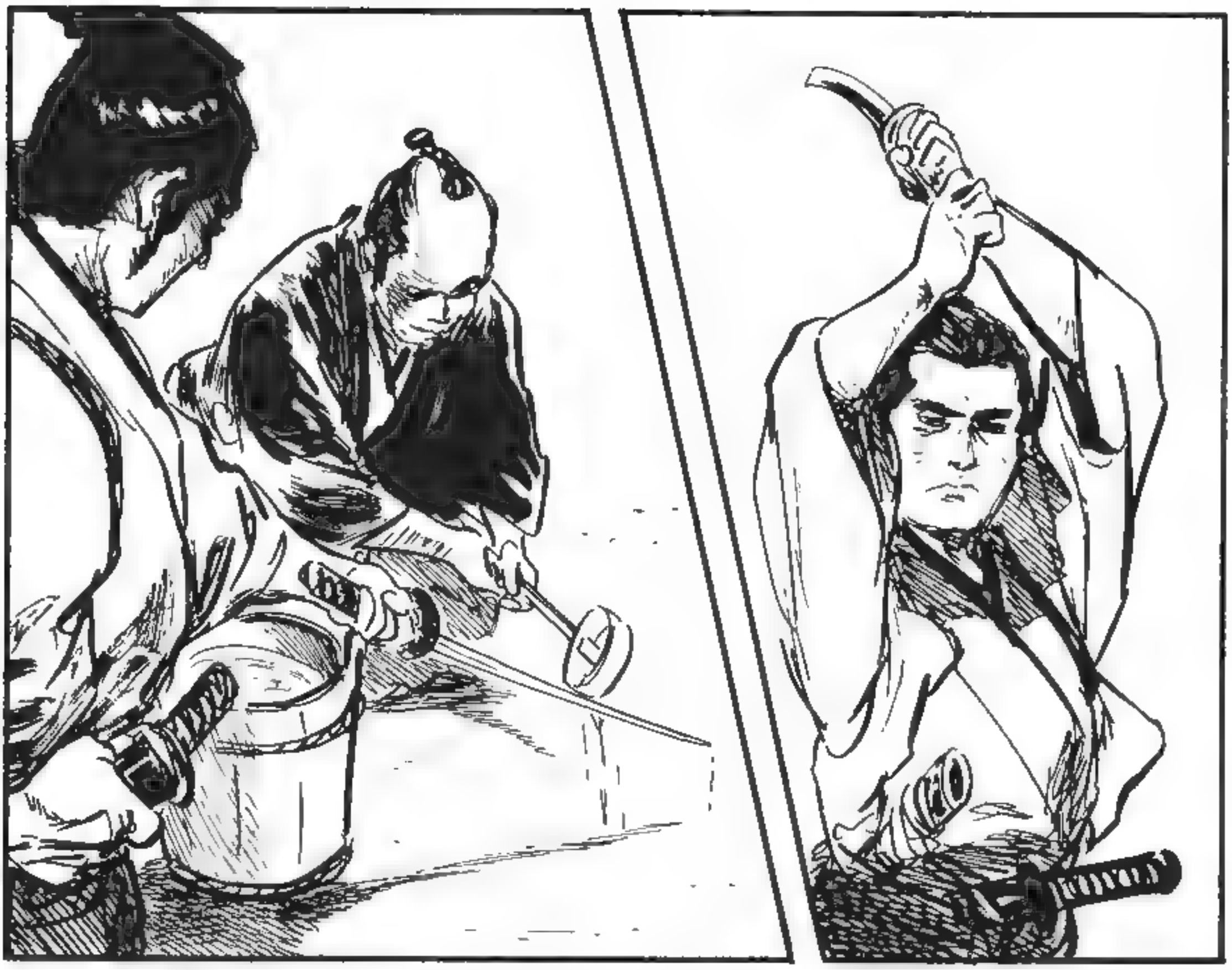
I AM SORRY THAT I HAVE INCONVENIENCED YOU.

NEVER MIND. JUST KEEP CUTTING YOUR NAILS.

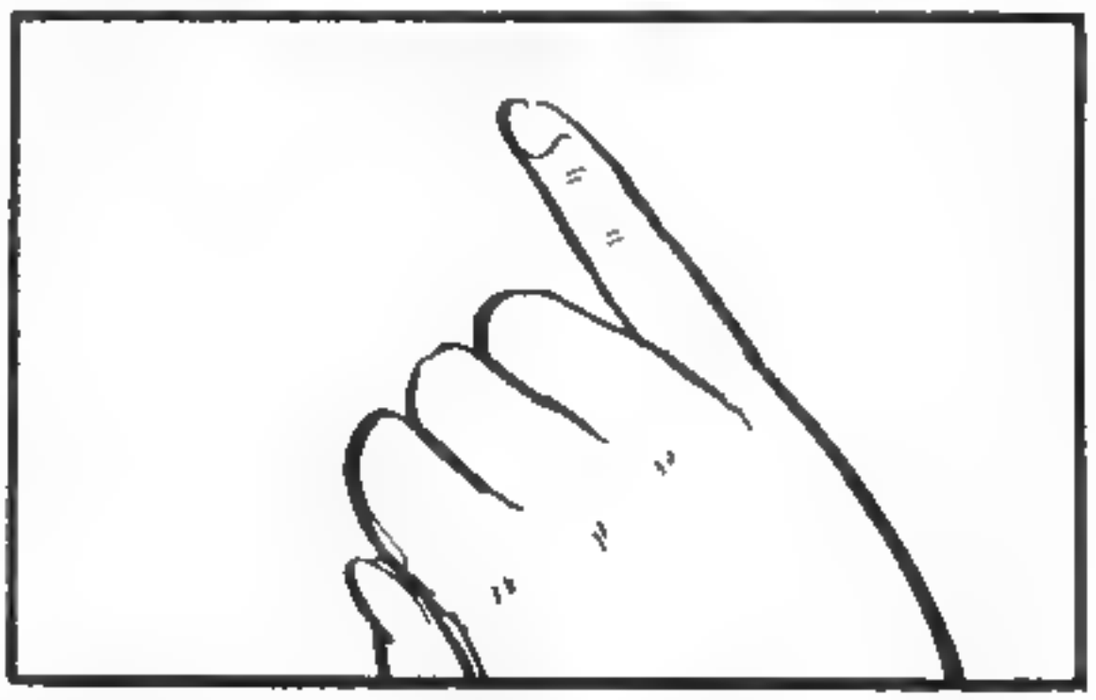
THANK YOU.

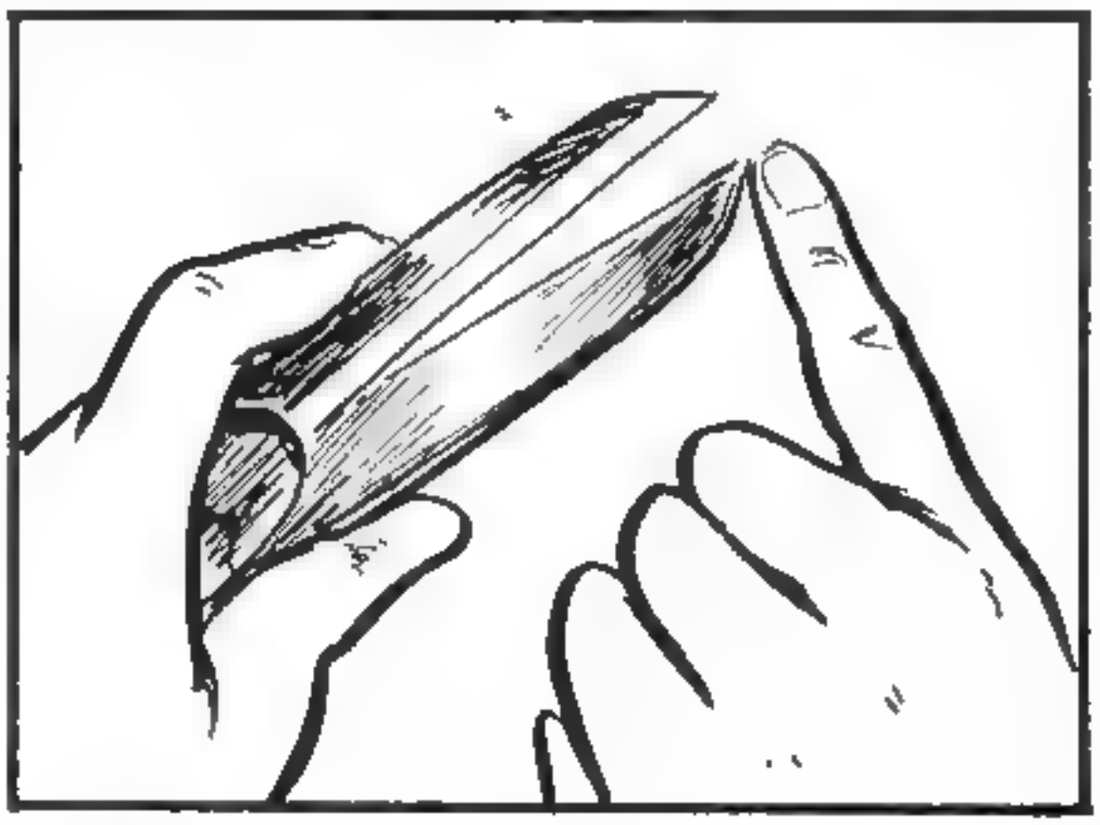
KLIPP

KLIPP



KLIP

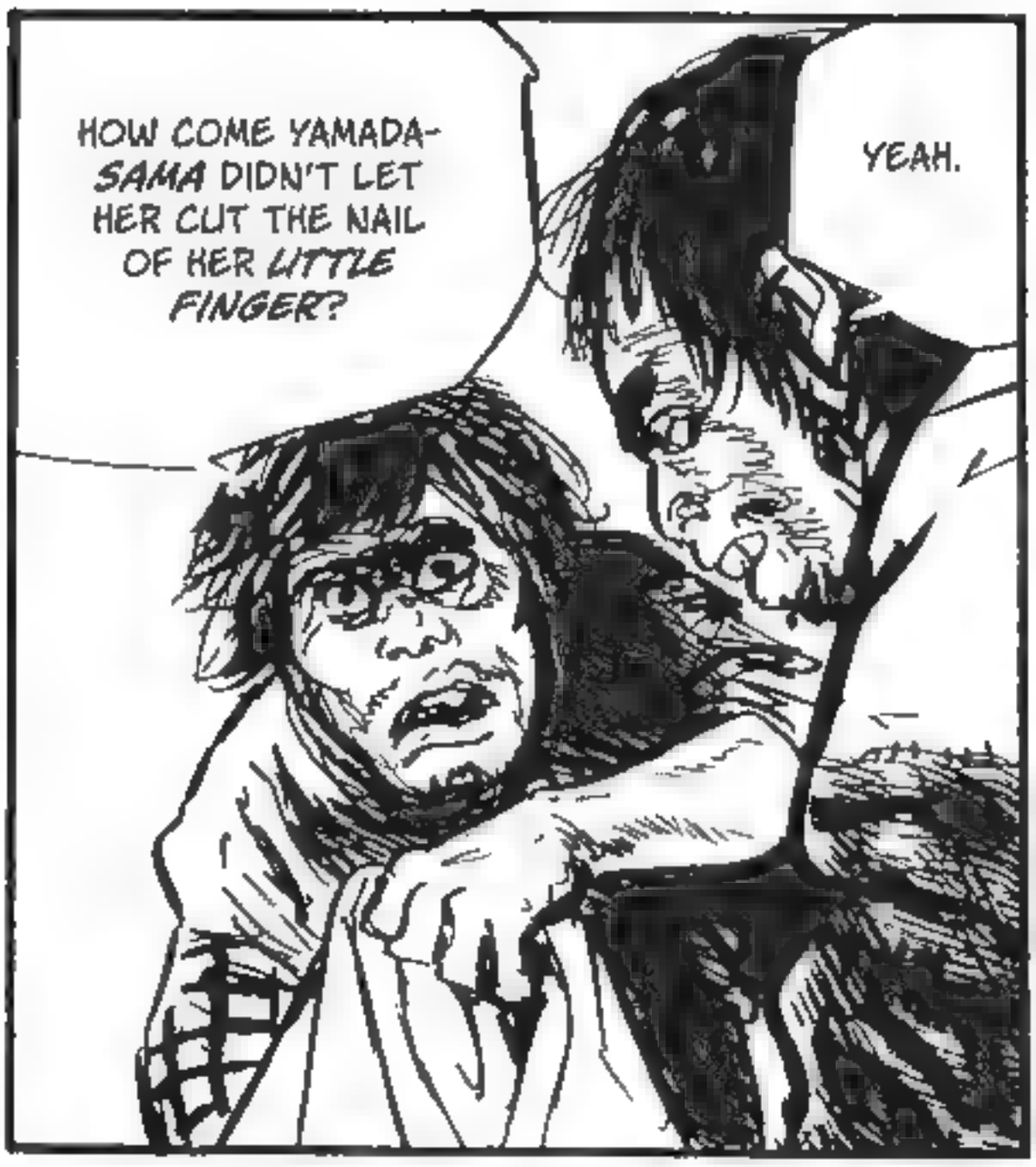




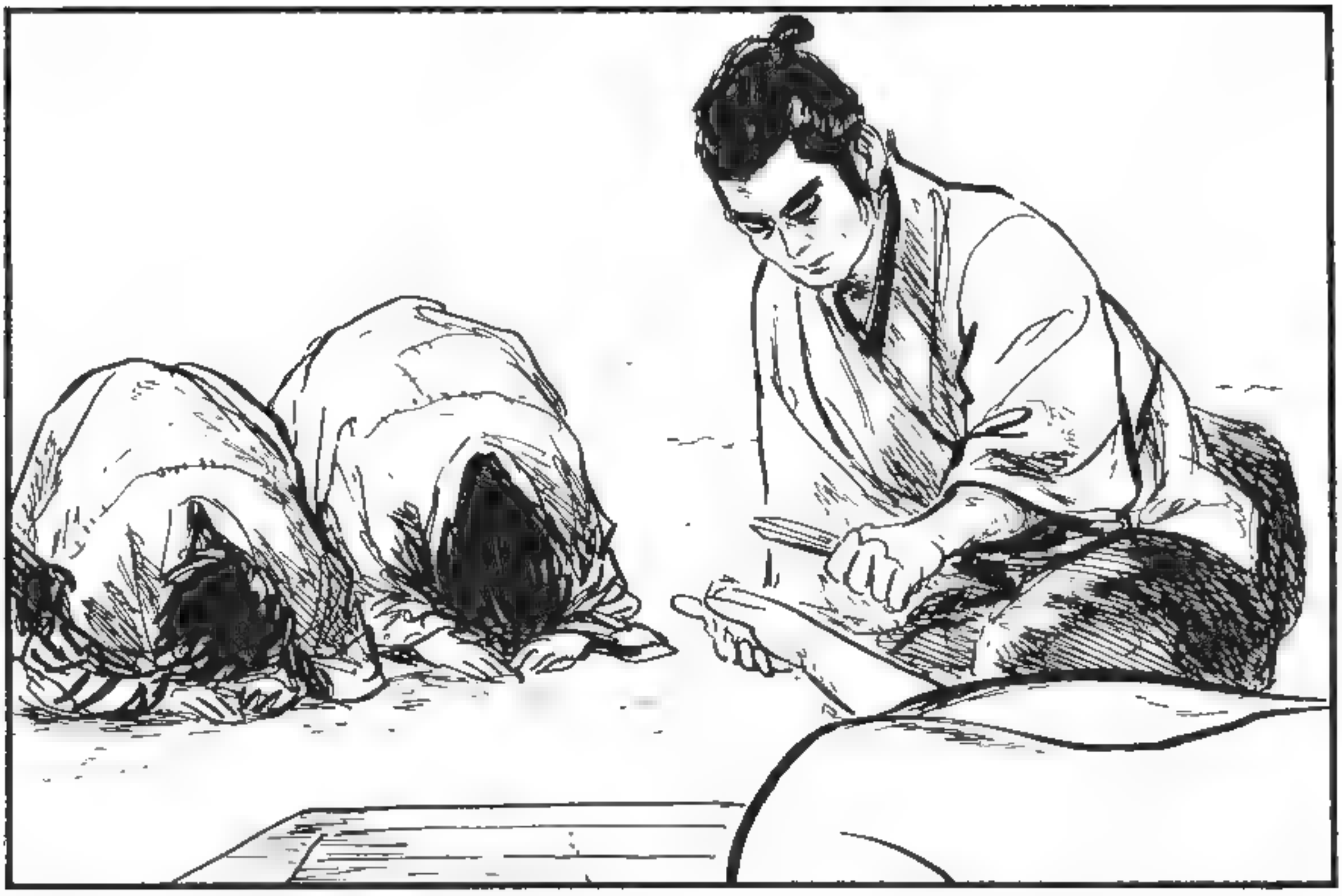
AHH

I DON'T GET IT.

I DON'T GET IT AT *ALL EITHER.*


HOW COME YAMADA-SAMA DIDN'T LET HER CUT THE NAIL OF HER LITTLE FINGER?
YEAH.

MAYBE HE WANTED TO SEE HOW READY SHE WAS TO DIE AFTER SHE FINISHED CLIPPIN' HER NAILS.
YEAH.



WHEN *YOU* CLIP YOUR NAILS...
WHICH HAND HOLDS THE *CLIPPER*, AND WHICH HAND IS CLIPPED *FIRST*?

HEH, HEH. I DON'T CLIP MY NAILS AN AWFUL LOT...
...HEH, HEH. BUT I HOLD THE CLIPPERS IN MY *RIGHT* HAND AND START CUTTIN' THE NAILS OFF MY *LEFT* HAND.
OH, THAT LADY HELD THE CLIPPERS IN HER *LEFT* HAND AND STARTED CUTTIN' THE NAILS OFF HER *RIGHT* HAND...

SHE SAID SHE CUT HER HUSBAND'S NAILS RIGHT *BEFORE* SHE STRANGLED HIM.
PERHAPS SHE COULDN'T BEAR TO SEE HIM *SICK* AND *SUFFERING*. THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT SHE WAS READY TO FOLLOW HER HUSBAND IN *DEATH*.

BUT THEN SHE WAS SOON *CAUGHT* AND SHE LOST HER *CHANCE*.

SO IF THAT'S THE CASE... HOW COME SHE DIDN'T JUST BITE HER TONGUE AN' KILL HERSELF?

EVEN THOUGH SHE HAD *LOTSA* CHANCES-- AT THE *POLICE STATION*, IN *PRISON*...

PERHAPS BECAUSE SHE DIDN'T WANT TO *TROUBLE* ANYONE.

IF SHE COMMITTED *SUICIDE* AT THE EXECUTION GROUNDS, SHE WOULD TROUBLE *NO ONE* BECAUSE EVERYTHING HAD ALREADY BEEN PREPARED FOR HER DEATH.

S... *SUICIDE*...?!

H-HERE...?!

AND *THAT* IS WHY SHE STARTED CUTTING THE NAILS OFF HER *RIGHT* HAND WITH THE CLIPPERS IN HER *LEFT* HAND.

S...
SO...

I THINK IT'S BECAUSE SHE HAD TO *CHANGE HANDS.*

SHE WAS GOING TO USE THE CLIPPERS WITH HER *RIGHT* HAND TO FINISH CUTTING HER NAILS AND THEN *STAB* HERSELF IN THE *THROAT.*

SHE WAS A *SAMURAI'S* WIFE.

NONE OF US FIGURED OUT WHAT SHE WAS UP TO. I WAS ALMOST AS MUCH IN THE DARK AS EITHER OF *YOU.*

THAT'S WHY I BEHEADED HER *BEFORE* SHE WAS FINISHED. I TOO MUST DO MY DUTY AS A SAMURAI.

NAMU...

KLIP

the fifty-fourth

Cough

KOFF KOFF

KOFF

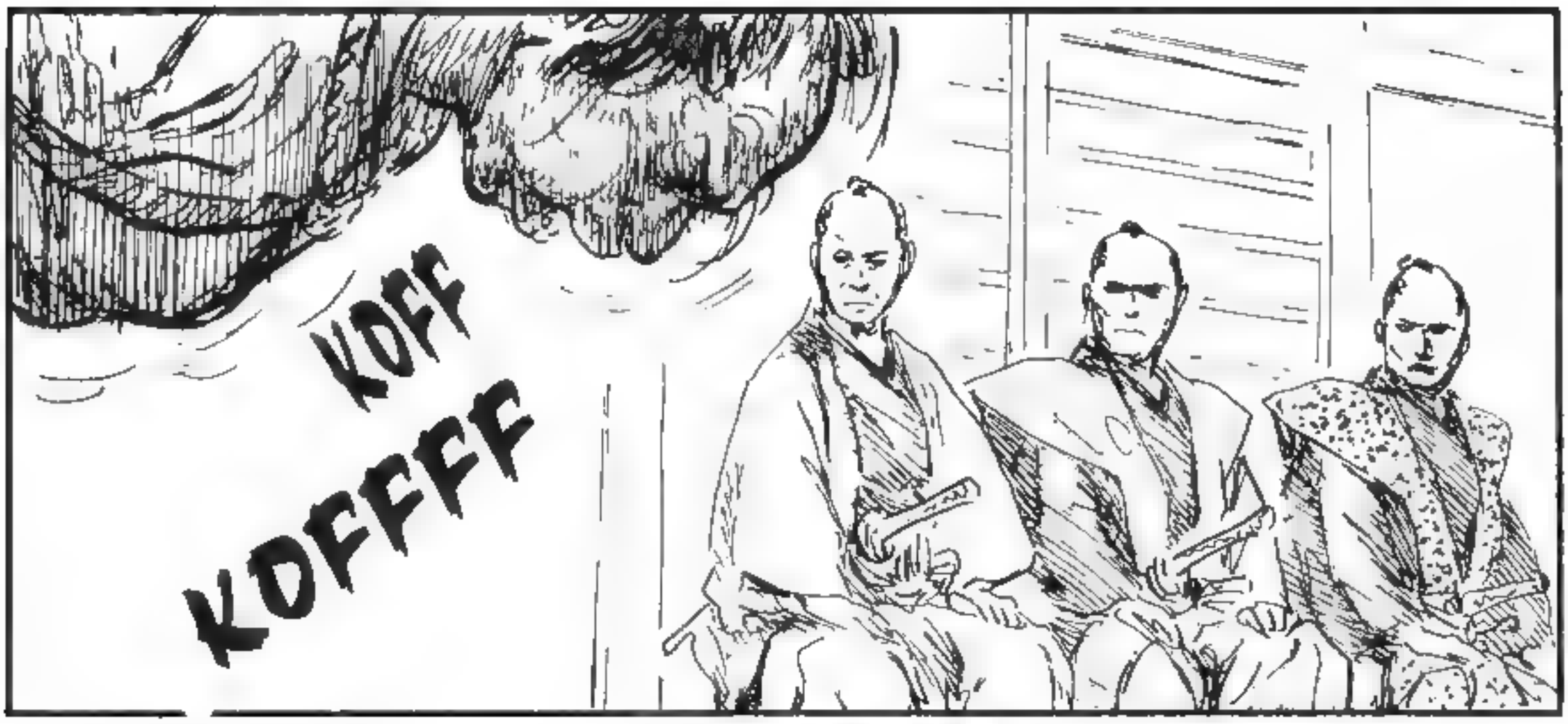
KOFF KOFF

KOFF
KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF

WHEEZE
HUFF
HUFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF

KOFF KOFF KOFF
KOFF KOFF KOFF KOFF KOFF
KOFFFFF
KOFF KOFFFFF

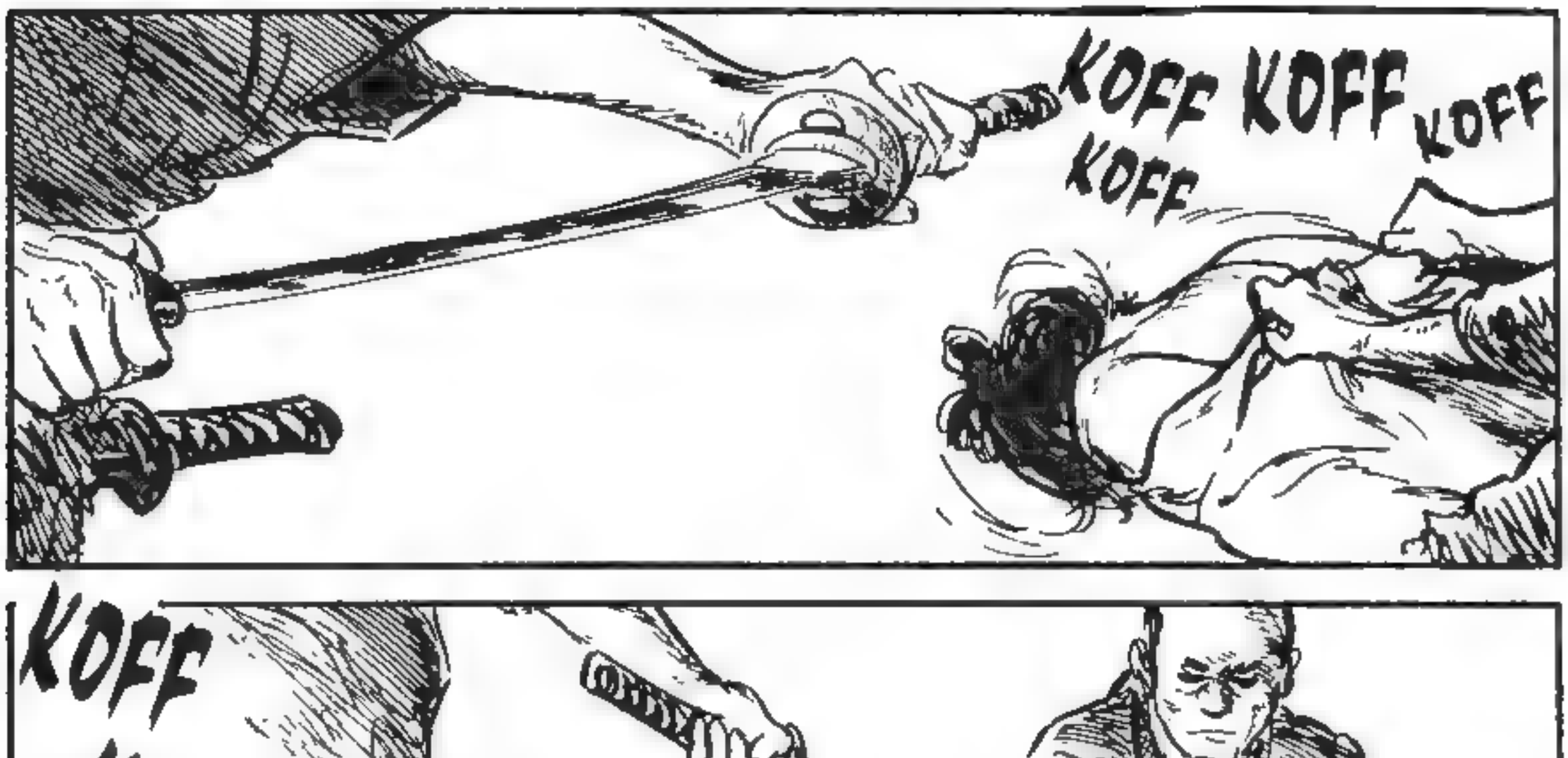
KOFF
AGHH
GRAGG
SPLURT
KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF KOFF KOFF
KOFF


KOFF
KOFFFF

KOFF
KOFF
KOFF

KOFF
KOFF KOFF KOFF
KOFF

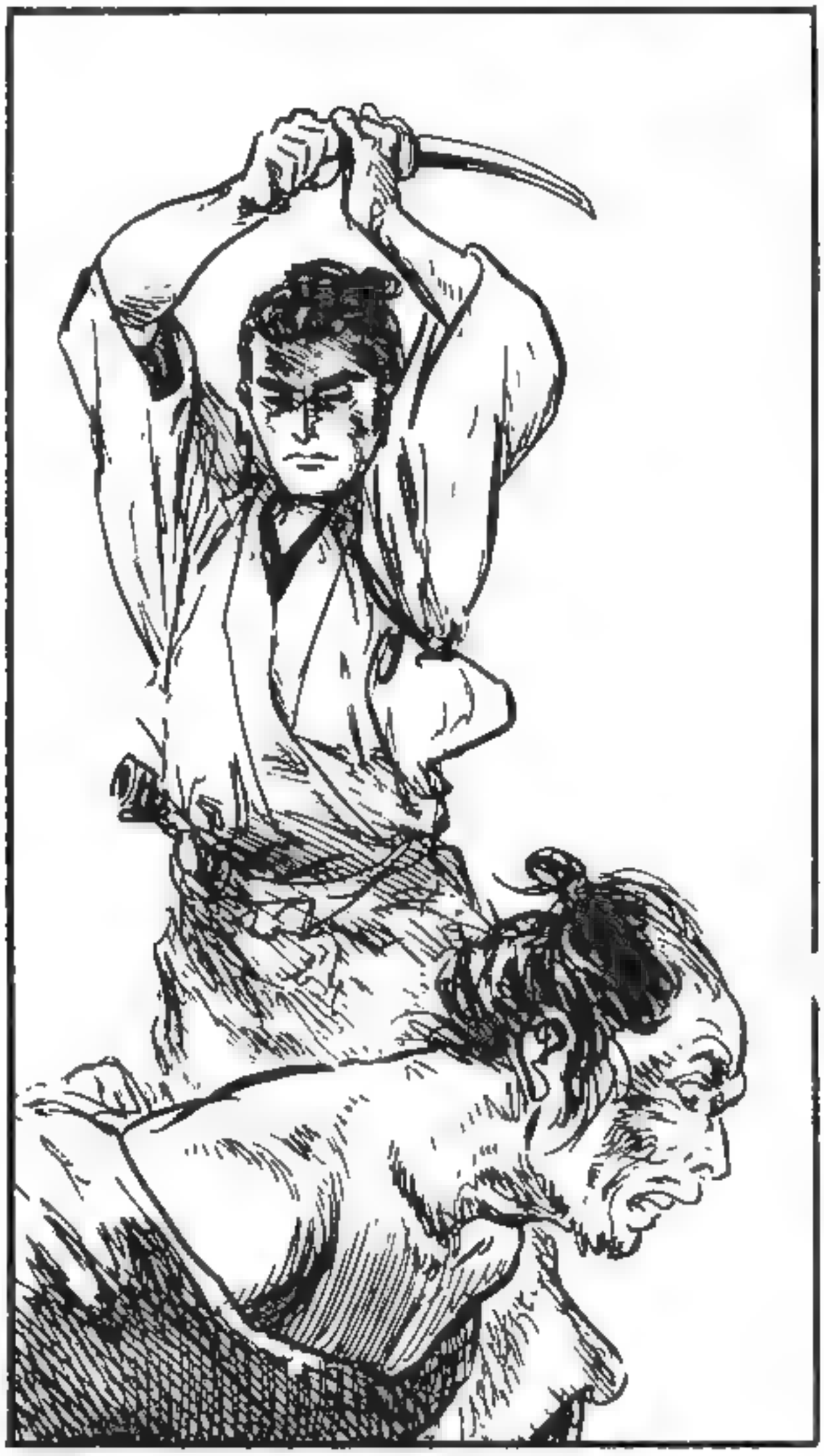
BAHH
KOFF
KOFFFF
BTTT
BTTT
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFFFF
WHEEEEZE
GASP
GASP
KOFF
KOFFFF

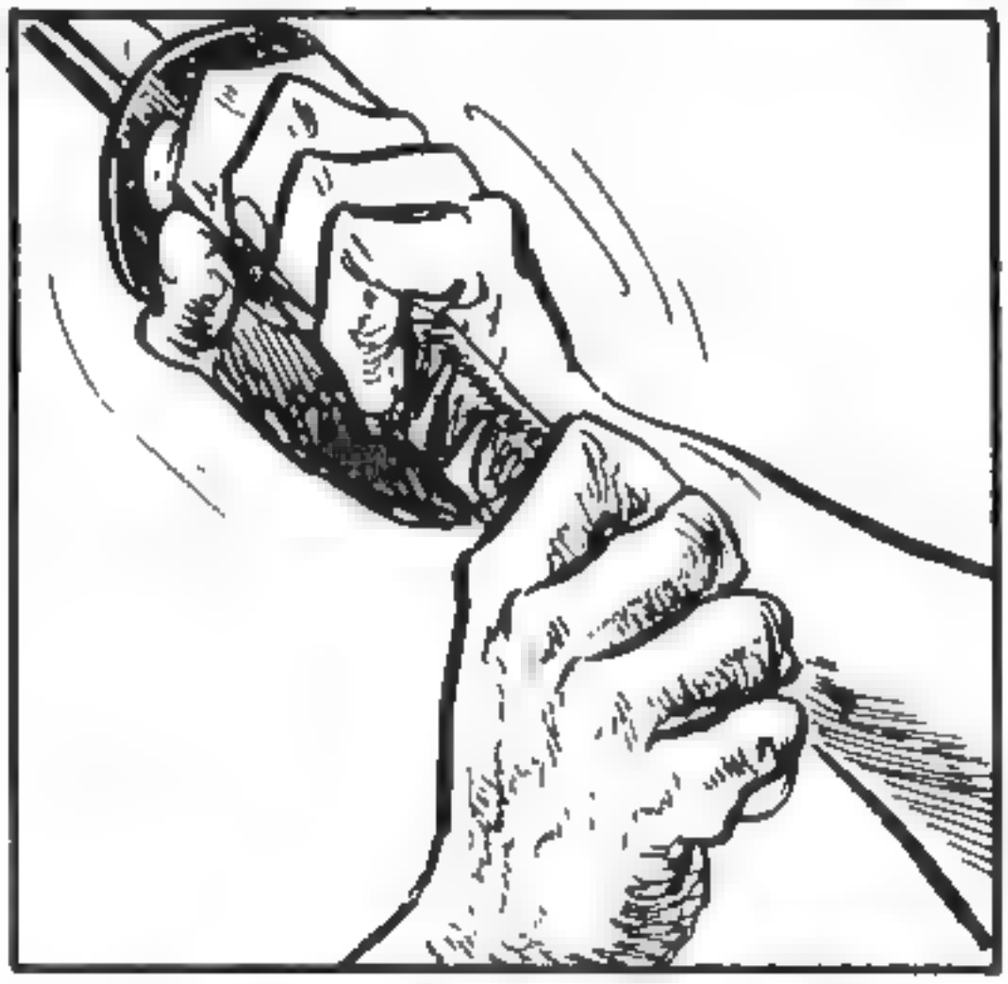

KOFF KOFF KOFF
KOFF
KOFF KOFF

KOFFFF
KOFF

PLUNK

GASP!





KOFF
KOFF

KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF
KOFF
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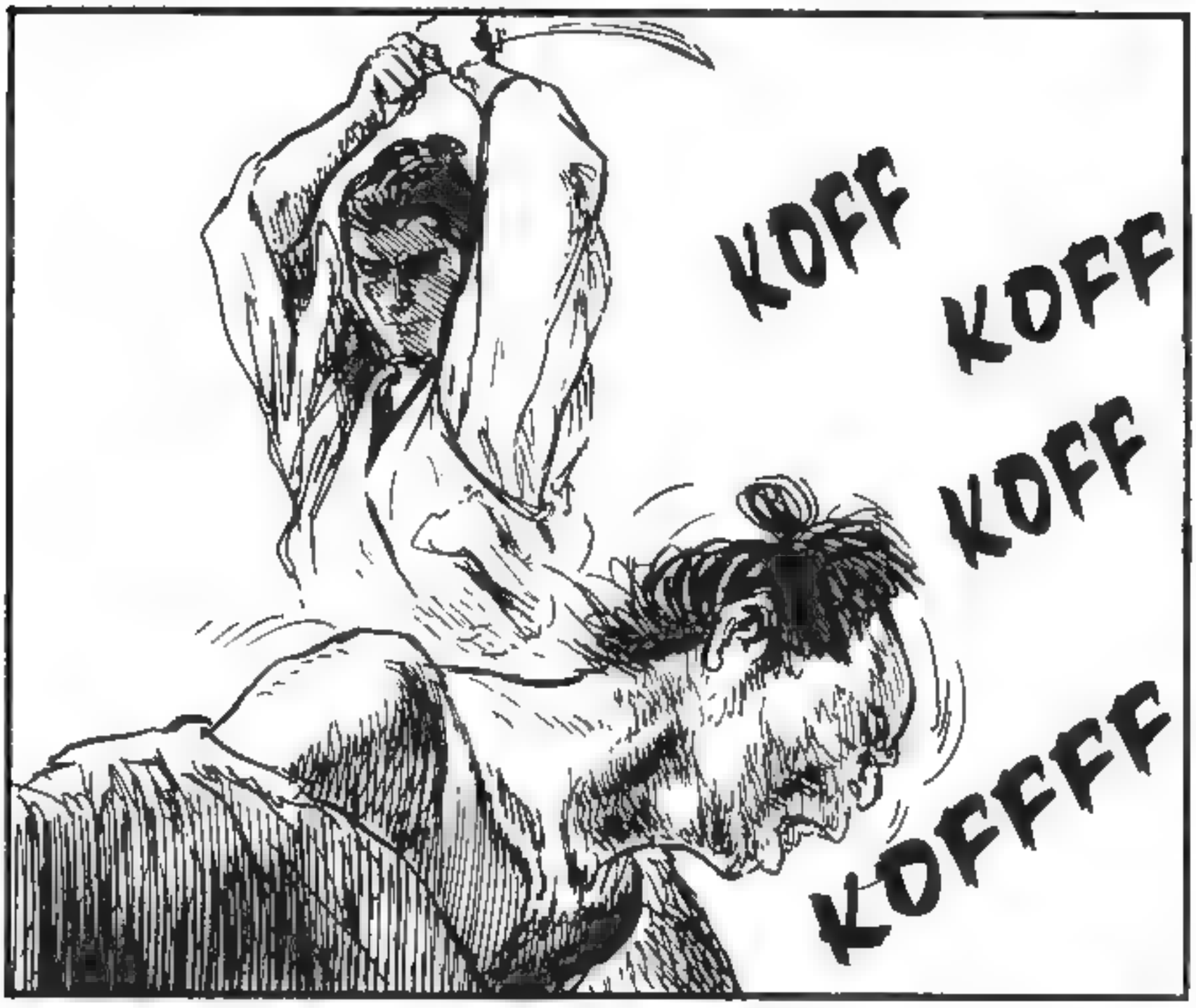
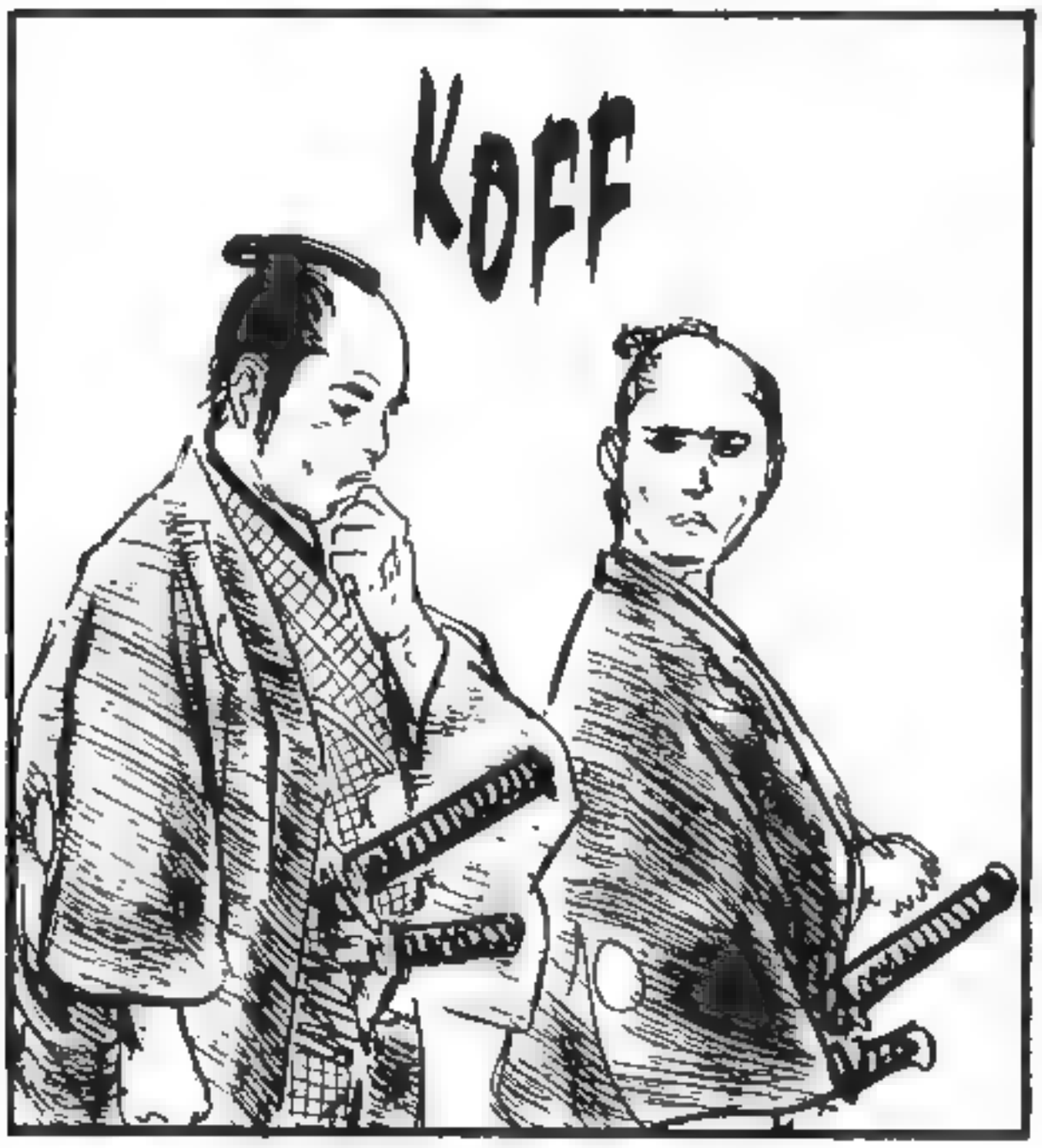
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFFFF



WHEEE

KOFF!

KOFF



KOFF

THAT WAS *ME!*

TENMA PRISON

KOFF

KOFF

AHHH
AAH

AH!
AH!
HH
AH

AHHH

AH AAAAAH

AHHHHHHH

AH OH

AAHHHH

CCC

EEE

AHHH...

AH AHH

H... KOF

AHHH...

K... KOFFF

F

OK

KOFF

KOFF

KOFF KOFF

KOFF KOFF KOFF

YOU OKAY?

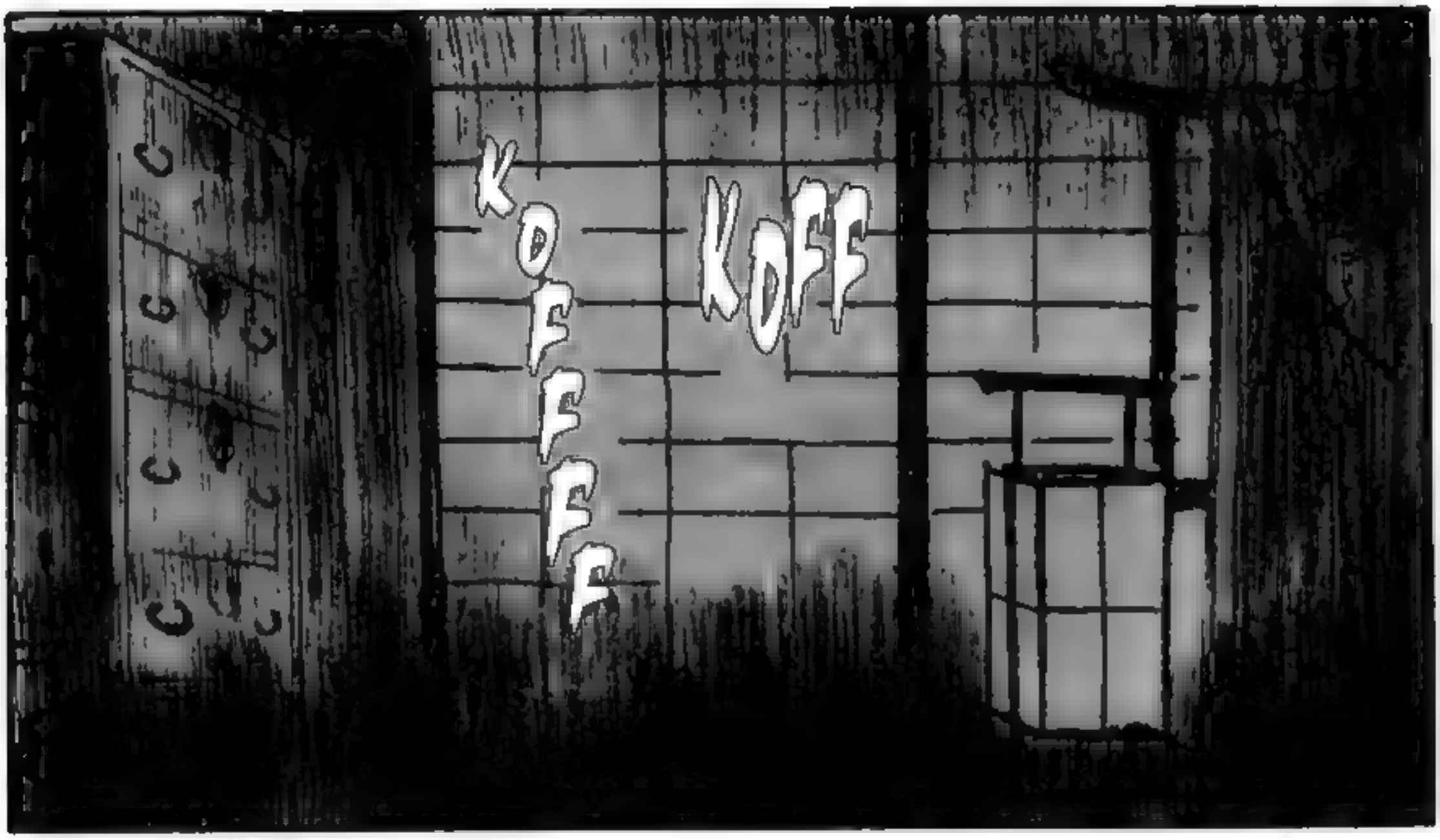
I-I'M FINE...

KOFF KOFF

KOFF KOFF

DON'T SEEM TO HAVE A *FEVER*... MUST BE A *COLD*.

KOFF KOFF KOFF KOFF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KOFFFF

KOFFFF

KOFFFF

KOFFFF

YOU'RE SICK 'CAUSE THERE'S A BAD *COUGH* GOING AROUND NOW.

WHO'D YOU GET IT FROM?

TODAY...

KOFF

KOFF

...I VISITED...

...YAMADA-*SAMA'S* HOUSE...

KOFFFF

...I HEARD HE HAD A *COLD*...

...SO I CAME TO *VISIT.*

YAMADA-*SAMA*, HUH? HEH. IF A *TITAN* LIKE HIM CAN GET SICK...

KOFFFF

...SO CAN A *KAPPA*. HA HA HA...

KOFF KOFFFF

SORRY, I WAS BEING *MEAN*. YOU'LL BE *OKAY*. *REALLY*.

KOFFFF KOFFFF

KITCH KITCH

KOFF KOFF KOFF KOFF

KOFF

HUFF HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

KOFF
KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF

KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF
...WAS I
DREAMING?

THUNK THUNK THUNK THUNK

KOFF KOFFEE

KOFF

GUARDHOUSE

KOFF KOFF

SO IT WAS *YOU* WHO BROKE INTO *BIZENYA!*

I GUESSED *RIGHT!*

KOFFFF

DON'T YOU...

C-COUGH.

KOFF KOFF KOFF KOFF

YOU'RE A *BAD LOSER*, MONKEY SANJI!

YOU'RE GONNA LOSE YOUR *HEAD*! THERE'S *NO* POINT IN HIDING...

YORU

..ANY OTHER CRIMES OF YOURS!

KOFFFF

KOFFFF

I'M SORRY.

KOFFFF

KOFF

KOFF

ALL RIGHT.

YOU'RE GOING TO *TENMA PRISON.* STAND UP

KOFF

KOFFFF

KOFFFF

KOFFFF

KOFFFF

YOU'RE REAL *LOW*, KASAJIRŌ.

YOU'RE NOT GONNA SEND ME TO MY *DEATH* WHILE I'M STILL *COUGHIN'*, ARE YA?!

AND IF YOU *ARE*, THEN I'M GONNA *GIVE* IT TO HEADCHOPPER *ASA!*

KOFF

KOFF

KOFF

KOFFFF

KOFF KOFFFF KOFF KOFFFF

KOFF KOFFFF KOFF

KOFF KOFF

KOFF KOFF KOFFFF

KOFF KOFF

KOFF KOFF KOFFFF

AAACK

PTOU!

KOFF
KOFF
KOFFFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF
IF YOU HAVE ANY *LAST WORDS*, I'LL LISTEN.

I... I GOT *ONE*...

KOFF

...*QUESTION*.

KOFF

WHAT *IS* COUGHIN'?

I *KNOW* IT'S A KINDA *SICKNESS*...

BUT IT'S A *FUNNY* SICKNESS, 'CAUSE YOU *CATCH* IT FROM SOMEONE ELSE.

KOFF

KOFF

KOFFFF—

MAYBE YOUR *FATE'S* LIKE COUGHING... SOMETHING YOU *CATCH*.

HEADCHOPPER ASA... YOU MAY BE HIGH 'N' MIGHTY, BUT YOU'RE A *HUMAN BEING* TOO. HEE HEE.
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF

WE'RE ALL *PEOPLE*. WE CAN ALL *COUGH*. BUT *SOME* GUYS CHOP OFF HEADS, AN' *SOME* GUYS GET THEIR HEADS CHOPPED OFF. I JUST DON'T GET IT. THIS WORLD DON'T MAKE *NO SENSE*.

WHEEEZE
KOFF
KOFF
KOFF

YOU'RE *COUGHIN'*.

KOFF

I GET THE FEELIN' YOU MUST *AGREE* WITH ME. US HUMAN BEINGS *ARE* ALL THE SAME, RIGHT?

KOFFFFF

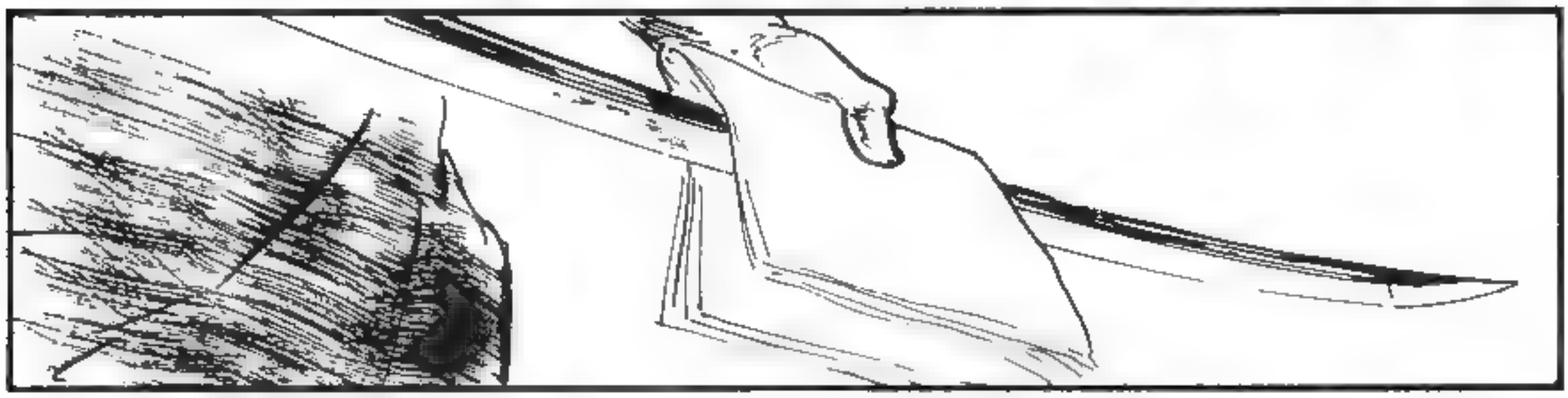
FATE'S SOMETHIN' THAT GOES *ROUND* 'N' *ROUND*. WHEN I GET REBORN *THIS* TIME...

KOFF

KOFF KOFF

KOFF
KOFFFF
whoosh!

KOFF



YOU DID A FINE JOB, SIR.

THE MAN YOU JUST EXECUTED TODAY... WAS ONE OF MY CONSTABLES.

KOFFFF KOFF

KOFFFF KOFF

HE CAUGHT THE COUGH FROM *ME*.

KOFF KOFF KOFF KOFF

WHAT HE SAID
BEFORE HE DIED
STILL *LINGERS*
IN MY *EARS*...

KOFF...

COUGHING REALLY *DOES* SPREAD FROM PERSON TO PERSON. THEY CAN ONLY CATCH IT UNDER *PRECISELY* THE SAME CONDITIONS. NOTHING, NOT *STRENGTH*, NOT *FORCE OF WILL*, CAN ENABLE US TO AVOID IT.

BUT I FEEL THAT ALL HUMANS ARE LIVING TOGETHER WITHIN THE *SAME* HUGE RING. INSIDE THIS RING, THERE ARE PEOPLE LIKE *ME* WHO *CATCH* PEOPLE AND PEOPLE LIKE YOU, YAMADA-*SAMA*, WHO *EXECUTE* PEOPLE.

CONVERSELY, THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO *GET* CAUGHT AND PEOPLE WHO *GET* EXECUTED. IF WE WEREN'T *ALL* IN THE SAME RING, HOW COULD WE ALL BE *CONNECTED?*

ONE DAY, WE'LL BE ABLE TO MAKE A RING WHERE *EVERYONE'S* EQUAL. THIS LIFE... *THIS* RING IS A STEP TOWARD THAT GOAL...

KOFF

KOFF

THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE TO THINK.

KÖF

GLOSSARY

atsumono
Literally, "thick things." A kind of chrysanthemum.

bu
Approximately three millimeters.

chō
Section of a city.

gyōtoku
Virtue earned through the practice of Buddhist asceticism.

hirauchi
Literally "flat-pounded." A kind of ornamental hairpin.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Samurai Executioner*:
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama – used for superiors

jitte
Truncheon carried by street cops.

jikisan
A samurai directly under the shōgun.

kappa
A water sprite.

kasuzu
Literally, "lees vinegar." Produced from sake dregs.

ken
Approximately two yards.

mochi
A sticky, pounded rice cake.

namu
Beginning of a common prayer for the dead.

nenbutsu
Buddhist prayer.

ri
Approximately four kilometers.

rin
Approximately a third of a millimeter.

shaku
Approximately thirty centimeters.

sun
Approximately three centimeters.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

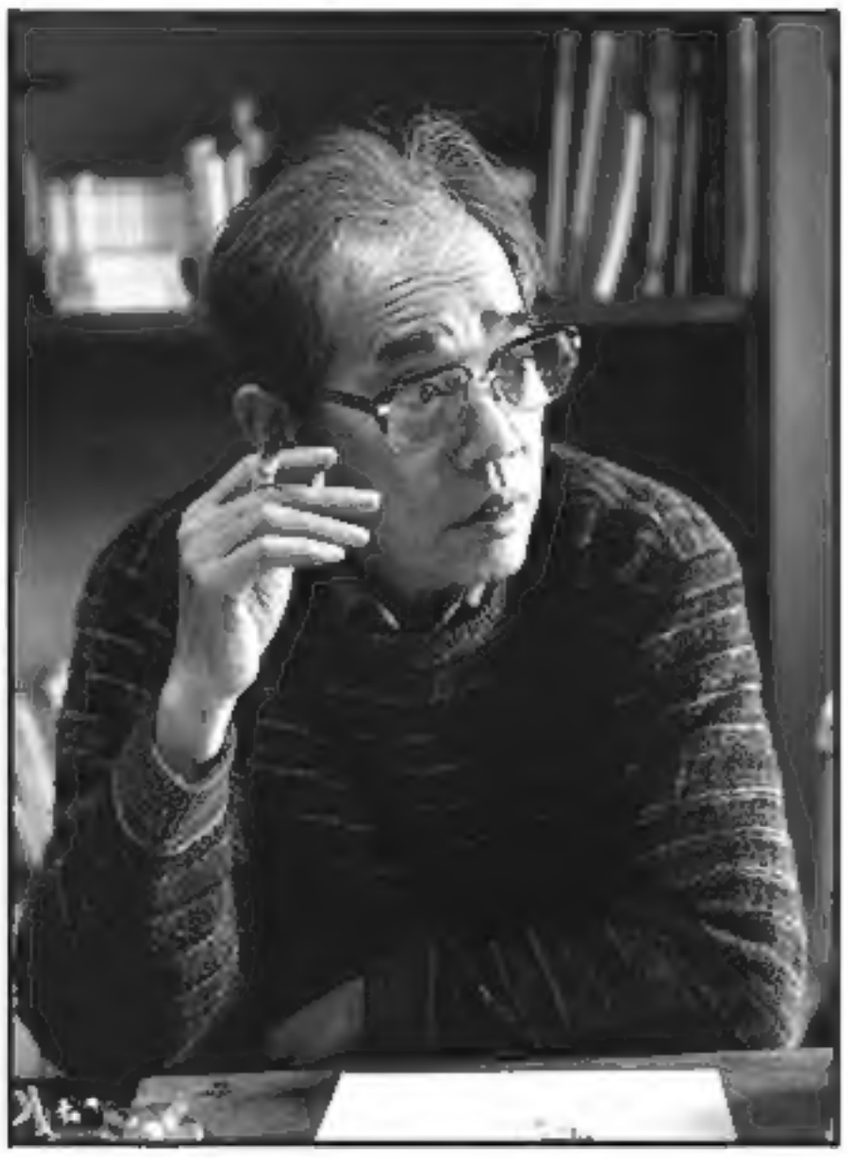
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami (Lone Wolf and Cub)*. Many additional series would follow, including this related series, *Samurai Executioner.*

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



"Catcher" Kasajiro is in trouble. As one of Edo's most reputable samurai cops, you'd expect him to be in the midst of Edo's troubles, but this is entirely different. The constable wants to hire his wife to be a cop as well! It's a story of gender struggles in a time long past. All the while criminals keep losing their heads to Asa the decapitator. But one criminal might leave something behind that could hurt our favorite protagonist.

Drafted by the creators of *Lone Wolf and Cub*, Dark Horse Comics has been proud to present this beautiful and individual series of samurai-era crime and punishment drama.

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Punished is not the man himself, but the evil that resides in him.

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